

# **IMPROVING BRANDING AND USER EXPERIENCE ON A COMPANY**

## **WEBSITE**

Case Pieni Eläinkauppa



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Tutkimuksen tarkoituksena oli selvittää, miten yhteistyöyrityksen verkkosivujen käyttäjäkokemusta ja niiden synnyttämää brändimielikuvaa olisi mahdollista kehittää. Tätä tietoa hyödyntäen yhteistyöyritykselle luotiin suunnitelma uudesta verkkosivusta. Tutkimuksen tarve perustui yhteistyöyrityksen nykyisillä verkkosivuilla havaittuihin ongelmakohtiin. Opinnäytetyön yhteistyöyrityksenä toimi kuopiolainen lemmikkitarvikeliike Pieni Eläinkauppa.

Opinnäytetyö on toiminnallinen, ja sen kirjoittamisessa käytetty taustatieto pohjautuu pääasiassa akateemiseen kirjallisuuteen. Taustamateriaaleja tutkiessa selvisi, että niin brändäys kuin käyttäjäkokemuksin ovat moniulotteisia kokonaisuuksia, ja että erityisesti yritystä aiemmin tuntemattomalle henkilölle visuaalisella suunnittelulla on suuri merkitys molemmissa osa-alueissa.

Tutkimus keskittyi yrityksen nykyisen verkkosivun ja uuden verkkosivusuunnitelman brändimielikuvan ja käyttäjäkokemuksen laadun mittaamiseen. Työn tutkimusmateriaalit on kerätty usealla eri tavalla. Verkkosivujen brändimielikuvaa mitattiin kahden julkisesti jaetun nettikyselyn avulla, ja käyttäjäkokemuksen laatua arvioitiin tutkimukseen osallistuneita henkilöitä havainnoimalla ja heille osoitetuilla mielipidekyselyillä. Kerätty data oli lähes pelkästään kvantitatiivista, joten saatua tutkimusmateriaalia analysoitiin vertailemalla vastaajien antamia arvosanoja ja muuta numeerista dataa toisiinsa.

Tutkimustuloksia analysoidessa havaittiin, että yhteistyöyrityksen nykyisillä verkkosivuilla teoreettisina havaitut ongelmat olivat näkyvissä myös käytännössä. Uutta verkkosivusuunnitelmaa koskeva data puolestaan viittasi mahdollisiin parannuksiin käyttäjäkokemuksessa ja brändimielikuvassa. Tutkimuksen tulosten perusteella voidaankin yhteistyöyritystä suositella testaamaan uutta verkkosivuvärsiötä käytännössä, jotta pystytään keräämään käytännön tietoa ja palautetta suoraan heidän asiakkailtaan ja kohdeyleisöltään.

Avainsanat www-sivut, brändäys, käyttäjäkokemus, visuaalinen suunnittelu

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The aim of the research was to find out how it would be possible to improve the user experience and branding on the commissioning company's website, and then implement this knowledge in practice by creating a new website design for the company. Thus, the main topics for the thesis are branding and user experience. The need for such research arose from the many identified issues with the commissioning company's current website. The commissioning company for this thesis was Pieni Eläinkauppa, a pet supply store located in Kuopio.

This thesis is a practice-based one. The background research for the thesis is mainly founded on academic literature. A review of these materials revealed that user experience and branding both consist of many different levels, and for people not previously familiar with the brand the visuals play an important part in leaving a positive impression both user experience- and branding-wise.

The research was focused on measuring the brand perception and the quality of user experience of both the current website and the new version. The materials for this research were collected in multiple ways. The perceived branding was researched by conducting two online surveys that were shared on public online communities, while the quality of user experience was assessed by making observations and collecting self-reported data from the participants. As the data gathered from this research was almost completely quantitative, the results were analyzed by comparing the ratings and other numerical data.

When analyzing the results, it was observed that the identified problems with the current website are also apparent in practice. Conversely, the data collected about the new website version implied possible improvements over the current website regarding brand perception and the user experience. Thus, it is recommended that the commissioning company could next test the new version of the website in practice and see how their own customers react to the changes.

Keywords website, web design, user experience, branding

Pages 58 pages and appendices 15 pages

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## 1 Introduction

As using the phone book to find relevant information about available businesses and products is a long-gone thing of the past, it has become a necessity for any modern business to have a digital presence in order to communicate with their current and potential customers. While there exists a number of ways to achieve this presence and the importance of the available options depends highly on the target audience, the significance of a company having its own website can never be overlooked (Miller, 2019; Kaplan, 2020).

For most people, the first, and often also the only way of trying to find information about services and products happens via an Internet search engine such as Google when they are in the information search stage of the buying process. Although a company might find relative success on existing digitally only on e.g. different social media platforms, the company profiles on these platforms are not search engine friendly or optimized in any way. Some platforms may even be restricted in functionality only to registered users – at the very least, a non-registered user can't contact the business by using the platform (e.g. the messaging features on Facebook and Twitter). As such, a person not already aware of the company and its offerings is unlikely to find such a business with the help of a search engine, resulting in lost revenue potential. Internet users have also been found to prefer reading about a company's services from their own website, rather than from their social media account (Verisign, 2015).

In addition, while a profile on a third-party platform is essentially controlled by the owner of said account, the service provider is still the one controlling the whole system behind it, increasing the uncertainty. Changes in platform pricing and policies may result in previous content and marketing strategies no longer working, or in the worst-case scenario, the whole business profile disappearing.

Conversely, a website is a fully owned platform, where the rules are written by the website owner and as such, does not include such a risk of policy changes. Because a website works as one of the customer touchpoints, it should feel familiar to the user (Wheeler, 2012, pp. 26-30) and be consistent in order to avoid confusion (Herbst & Musiolik, 2015). Luckily, the

content, visual design and branding on a website can be completely adjusted to fit the needs of a company, ensuring a greater detail in things such as the overall brand consistency, tone of voice and sales funnel. In addition, the website can be carefully search engine optimized, which together with appealing content is an excellent way of getting organic traffic to the company's website (Omniconvert, 2020). This helps both to increase awareness of the offerings and to keep current and potential customers more engaged.

Websites are an important part of company branding and are one way for a customer to experience a brand due to the visual nature of it (Schmitt et al., 2009; see also Iglesias et al., 2011). The brand experience in itself helps to establish a personal connection to the (potential) customer and affects customer satisfaction and loyalty (Schmitt et al, 2009; Wheeler, 2012, pp. 18-19), and when properly differentiated, creates preference over competitors (Ha & Perks, 2005; Iglesias et al., 2011; Schmitt et al., 2009; see also Wheeler, 2012). As the lack of prior brand experiences tends to have people making judgements based on extrinsic qualities (Ha & Perks, 2005), failing to create a positive first impression with a website may lead to negative emotions toward a company. Thus, the visual appeal of a website should be carefully considered.

While building a website that helps a business meet the goals set for it has many different layers to it, some of the most important things to consider are the user experience (UX), branding and search engine optimization, the first two of which will be covered in this thesis and the related research. However, as the layers that make a website often overlap with each other, the website design and building process itself will certainly take into consideration factors other than UX and branding as well.

This is a practice-based thesis and focuses on finding ways of overcoming the currently observed branding and UX-related issues with the case company's website, thus forming the research question: How to enhance the brand perception of Pieni Eläinkauppa with improved branding and UX on their website? The thesis work is based on the read background literature on the subject, the commissioning company's wishes and the author's own existing skillset related to website design. The decisions made during the design process are then validated by confirming the design with the commissioning company and by

conducting the research. The design and online implementation process of creating the new website design is covered in detail in its own section.

The improvement sought after in the presented research question is focused on improving the users' overall impression of the brand, company, and their website. The possible changes in the impression of users are measured with the help of two different research methods, a branding-related survey and UX testing with a selected small sample. The design and implementation process of the new website design is also a part of the used research methods, as it creates two different testing environments that can be contrasted to each other. Both the survey about branding and UX tests are conducted on both the current website and the new website design in order to see a comparable difference.

The used research methods are described in full detail in their respective sections of this thesis. The results of the research are also analyzed to see whether there was any improvement in them.

### **1.1 Evaluating the current website**

Offering a consistent and appealing journey for the visitor of a website is essential for achieving the best possible potential that the website can offer to a business. The benefits of an overall optimized website are not only limited to better and stronger branding, but affect the overall mindset that a visitor has toward a business – a smooth experience with high visual appeal leaves a positive impression on the visitor, thus improving the brand experience as well. A properly built website with quality content also has a major impact on the search engine ranking, which affects the possible organic traffic to a site.

The commissioning company currently has a digital presence with both their own website and a Facebook business page. While the website meets some basic requirements for UX and branding, the quality of both is lacking due to not being optimized in any way. Both the UX and branding issues found on the current website are covered in the next sections.



### 1.1.1 User experience and branding issues

There are a number of ways a website's UX can be lacking, most of which have to do with either the visual design, content or the usability of the website (Berg, 2019; Clockwork, n.d.; Stable WP, n.d.). The commissioning company's website meets some of the basic criteria for offering a good UX, but fails to impress in any category in particular. Based on the potential UX issues mentioned in professional sources (Berg, 2019; Clockwork, n.d.; Stable WP, n.d.), the current website of the commissioning company:

- Lacks content, as there is no proper description of services, they are mainly listed with minimal text. In addition, the existing copy does not engage the visitor.
- Has an outdated visual design with a lack of quality pictures, both of which may make visitors judge the business in a negative manner.
- Does not have a custom-made 404 page, which may lead to the visitor leaving the site if they e.g. make a typo.
- Does not have a contact form which would make it easy for visitors to e.g. make product requests.
- Has issues with the navigation, where the visitor is required to click the text instead of the area surrounding it, despite visually suggesting otherwise.
- Is difficult to scroll when on the main page due to the excessively-sized location map, making the usability itself somewhat lacking.

In addition, from an entirely visual design based point-of-view, the site's content currently does not have much whitespace around it. Having an adequate amount of whitespace would allow for the content to "breathe", naturally guide the visitor's eyes to the most important elements and improve readability (code23, n.d.; Dotugo, n.d.; SuccessiveTech, 2019). Due to these little defects the overall visuals do not communicate much thoughtfulness of the design process.

Many, if not all of the UX-related issues also overlap with existing branding issues, as the UX is also a part of the brand and the brand experience. The website acts as a touchpoint for the customer and is thus a part of the brand experience that accumulates over time (Schmitt et al., 2009; see also Iglesias et al., 2011). For example, an outdated visual design on a website

may have a direct negative impact on the perception of the brand (Ha & Perks, 2005). Lack of content and a proper description of services also affect the brand experience.

## **2 Theoretical background**

Both UX and branding are extremely wide subjects and covering them exhaustively would go beyond the scope of this thesis study. However, these topics have been narrowed down to cover only the aspects most relevant to the case company and the research question.

The topic of branding is divided into many subtopics to make the content clearer and more logical to follow, with the subtopics focusing on aspects such as brand definition, consistency, brand experiences, creating brand loyalty, the importance of careful consideration of brand visuals etc. The concept of UX has also been divided into subtopics, with them covering themes such as visuals in UX context and designing and testing UX.

Both topics are also introduced with an overview into the subject. Each of these topics will be covered from a wide perspective, taking into consideration the existing research material on the subject as well as other relevant literature and sources on contemporary methods.

### **2.1 Branding**

As branding has a direct influence on many aspects that affect the success of a business, such as its reputation, trust amongst various stakeholders and perceived pricing, branding should be done by all businesses from the very beginning whether they are big or small. When a brand has been successfully established, it also becomes a part of the company's assets and accumulates more value to the business as well (Dandu, 2015). Successful branding is what enables a company to charge more for their offerings compared to their less branded competitors and it creates preference over competition.

Contrary to popular belief, branding is not always extremely expensive and unattainable for small businesses as the price for branding activities depends on the situation and actions needed (Dandu, 2015).

Even today, branding is often even officially defined and misunderstood as only consisting of designing and defining the visual representation of a brand, e.g. its logos, packaging of products and brand name. However, developing a brand is not limited to just visuals but instead also includes things such as advertising, customer service, the company's social responsibility and reputation. (Dandu, 2015)

Dandu (2015) describes branding as “the perpetual process of identifying, creating, and managing the cumulative assets and actions that shape the perception of a brand in stakeholders' minds”, while a simpler description may be that your brand is a promise to your customer (Llach, 2020).

### **2.1.1 Defining and narrowing down a brand**

While it may feel like an appealing idea to try to target everyone in the world with a company – after all, having the whole population of the Earth as customers would likely lead to considerable revenues – such a wide approach fails in practice. The wider a brand is spread, the thinner it tends to become, as its focus can no longer be defined. Having a clear and narrow focus of the ideal customer the brand is trying to appeal to helps to create a brand that speaks to its customers on a more personal level. (Wheeler, 2012)

For this reason, the exact brand essence and core focus should be identified and specified before moving on to designing other elements of the brand, such as the visuals. When this brand essence has been found, it becomes possible to position it according to the competition, customer demographics and the customers' needs. With the help of this strong positioning, customers are able to understand, value, identify and eventually own a brand, which builds customer loyalty. (Wheeler, 2012, p. 136)

### **2.1.2 Brand consistency**

While it may sometimes be easy to forget, staying true to the brand throughout every customer touchpoint is a vital part of strengthening a brand. The experience a customer has with a brand should follow through whether the customer is communicating with a customer service agent, receiving the company's newsletter or reading the content on their

website. All of the touchpoints are an essential part of creating a seamless and coherent brand experience, and they should feel familiar to the customer. (Wheeler, 2012, pp. 26-30) Oftentimes a brand's online presence fails to be consistent with their offline presence, which potentially confuses consumers (Herbst & Musiolik, 2015).

In website design, an often-forgotten part of maintaining a brand consistency is a favicon – a small, 16 by 16 pixels icon that is visible next to the website's title on the tab and when a site is bookmarked. While it may seem like a mundane part of brand consistency, it still is a way of strengthening the perceived brand experience through coherency. (Wheeler, 2012, p. 168) Another way of building consistency on a company website is through the correct use of static and dynamic pages (Roy et al., 2021), with the static pages including pages such as "About us" and "Our mission", and dynamic pages consisting of e.g. blog posts and social media content. The static pages establish the brand impression while the dynamic ones maintain that impression while strengthening brand consistency (Roy et al., 2021).

In addition, it is also important to note that a company's values should directly reflect the marketed brand image, and remember to stay true to these values in practice as well (Wheeler, 2012). This kind of transparency is especially important in today's competitive economy, as social media has made it easy to quickly share everything that comes to light, whether it be negative or positive. For example, trying to market a brand as socially responsible while using questionable workforce would be a case of the marketed values and reality clashing. In general, consumers avoid brands that have emotional branding promises that are perceived as inauthentic in reality (Thompson et al., 2006).

### **2.1.3 Brand personality**

Brand personality consists of the human characteristics associated with a brand, with the different personality dimensions being sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication and ruggedness. These more high-level dimensions are divided into facets and even more descriptive personality traits. (Aaker, 1997)

Brand personality should be emotionally connected with the target customers, which allows the customers to feel a similarity between their perceived self and the brand, thus helping to

form a brand attachment. Brands can try to appeal either to the ideal or the actual self of their target customers. When targeting the ideal self, the company markets their offerings with the promise of improving the customer and thus making them better in some ways, while targeting the actual self is focused on providing the customer with proper ways of expressing themselves as they currently are. While both of these approaches can be effective, it should be carefully considered who the target audience is, as this highly affects the level of potential brand attachment formed in the targeted customer group, and the likelihood of that forming at all. As a generalization, brands that validate the customers current self, i.e. their actual self, have a higher chance of forming a strong emotional brand attachment with their customers. (Malär et al., 2011)

While brand personality is essentially defined either as a result of collaborative branding with customers (Malär et al., 2011), or solely by the company's own branding and marketing strategy, it cannot be completely formed just on the basis of that – brand experience works as a starting point. The results of the study by Schmitt and their colleagues (2009) manage to show a clear connection between having a brand experience and establishing a brand personality, thus suggesting that brand personality is highly a result formed on the basis of past brand experiences. Brand personality in itself affected satisfaction and loyalty, though loyalty was affected more strongly in an indirect way with satisfaction acting as the mediator.

#### **2.1.4 Creating brand experiences and brand loyalty**

The traditional way of marketing a brand used to focus on bombarding potential customers with various advertisements and messages through every feasible channel, but as today's customers are already too used to the constant marketing messages everywhere, trying to stand above the crowd simply by shouting the brand's name everywhere is not enough to reach them. Nowadays, people are a lot more susceptible to experiences that brands offer to them. (Wheeler, 2012, pp. 18-19)

While the experiences perceived by the consumption of a company's offerings only make a part of a brand experience (Schmitt et al., 2009; see also Iglesias et al., 2011), some of the findings that apply to consumption experiences may also be applied to brand experiences. In

the case of consumption-related experiences, their importance can be observed by looking at historical evidence of how economies have shifted from one stage to another as the predominant offering of that economy has been commoditized (Pine II & Gilmore, 2013). In order to stay relevant and avoid competing solely on the price, companies must personalize their services and appeal to people by offering them experiences instead of goods or services (Pine II & Gilmore, 2013). This highlights the importance of appealing to the consumers' side that craves for experiences.

Schmitt along with other researchers (2009; see also Iglesias et al., 2011) describes brand experience as a combination of different levels of experiences a person has when interacting or coming to contact with a brand in any way. These experiences are then further categorized into five experience dimensions: sensory, affective, intellectual, behavioral and social, with each of these consisting of different feelings, sensations, behavioral responses and perceptions. A brand experience may form from either direct or indirect experiences. Direct experiences could include examples such as shopping or receiving service from the company personnel, or consuming products or services, while indirect experiences would consist of e.g. seeing advertisements or visiting a company website for information. The visual brand representations are also one way for the consumer to experience a brand. These include elements such as the colors and shapes used, typefaces, the company website, the company name and identity.

While an accumulated brand experience may in time lead to the customer forming a mental bond with a brand, it does not directly represent the presence of such (Schmitt et al., 2009). However, offering brand experiences is crucial for achieving many branding-related goals.

Brand experiences make a customer remember a brand for a longer time and help to build an emotional connection (Wheeler, 2012, pp. 18-19). In the study by Schmitt and other researchers (2009), the authors argue that strong brand experiences stay in a person's memory for a longer time, over time affecting the overall consumer satisfaction and with it, loyalty. Brands delivering a strong brand experience were also found to be seen in a more positive light than those offering weak brand experiences. This connection between a brand experience and brand loyalty was further explored by Iglesias and their colleagues (2011), where the authors suggest that brand loyalty and evangelism are best achieved by brands

that deliver consistency at all customer touchpoints, on top of successfully managing the emotional and functional elements in their products. This leads to a more unique and differentiated brand experience being offered to the consumers.

Though the functional elements and benefits of products are very necessary, this differentiated brand experience is the most important thing that helps create preference (i.e. loyalty) over competing brands. This is due to the emotions felt by the consumer, which will have a stronger impact on their memory – and these emotions create affective commitment to a brand. (Ha & Perks, 2005; Iglesias et al., 2011; Schmitt et al., 2009; see also Wheeler, 2012) Ha and Perks (2005) also support this by arguing that in the case of e.g. browsing webpages, having positive experiences are becoming an expectation for customers, rather than the focus being just on the value of information offered.

Brand experiences are formed and affected by numerous mediators, while brand experiences themselves also act as a mediator for various other relations and feelings a consumer may have toward a brand. For example, positive brand experiences have a connection to brand familiarity, as well as whether the pricing of services and goods are perceived as appropriate (Ha & Perks, 2005). Brand experience has also been found to have a significant effect on customer satisfaction, which may lead to them becoming brand trusting customers, which in turn fosters new trusting customers (Ha & Perks, 2005).

High brand experience and high affective commitment toward a brand have also been found to have a clear connection between them. In turn, this high affective commitment seems to also lead to higher brand loyalty. Affective commitment acts as the mediator between brand experiences and brand loyalty, which implies that there should be a focus on creating brand experiences for the customers and as such, help create emotions toward their brand, leading to brand loyalty. Brand loyalty in itself is a powerful way of creating resilience against competitors, thus being extremely important especially in the more competed markets, and a way to increase market share. (Iglesias et al., 2011)

### 2.1.5 Brand visuals

The company logo, colors, typography and other graphic elements chosen to represent the brand are a powerful way of making people remember it, as colors and symbols evoke emotion and express the brand's personality through a visual medium (Cunningham, 2017; Labrecque & Milne, 2011; Wheeler, 2012). The importance of wisely chosen visual brand elements is highlighted by the fact that people's brains work in a rather primitive fashion (Wheeler, 2012). Instead of comprehending the actual contents of something to begin with, the brain starts by recognizing the overall shape of it, then moving onto taking note of the color – and finally, focusing on the content (Wheeler, 2012).

If there are no prior associations that the consumer has about a certain brand, their assumption about its brand personality are based on the color, while the perception of a familiar brand's personality is based on the prior brand experiences as well as the color (Labrecque & Milne, 2011). Overall, the lack of prior brand experiences has the consumer being more inclined use extrinsic qualities when making their judgements about the quality of the brand (Ha & Perks, 2005).

With this, it could be presumed that ensuring a website's visual appeal may have a positive effect on the judgement made by the customer when they are not familiar with the brand in advance.

Color theory plays a big part in this thinking process, as things like different tones, hues and color temperatures all evoke different emotions in the viewer, thus affecting the perceived brand personality (Labrecque & Milne, 2011; Wheeler, 2012). With a properly selected hue, saturation and value, the company can communicate that is e.g. competent, sophisticated or rugged, depending on the personality they want consumers to perceive (Labrecque & Milne, 2011). These color-based brand personality perceptions also have a strong impact on the intent of purchase – for example, a customer seeking a product that is “strong and durable” they are inclined to choose a product that matches the rugged brand personality color-wise (Labrecque & Milne, 2011).

Apart from just thinking about the color psychology and what a brand wants to communicate with its chosen color palette, using color to differentiate the brand from



competition should be remembered. Picking the exact same or very similar colors as another player in the same markets would make it harder to uniquely associate them with some other brand. (Wheeler, 2012)

This strong association of color with a certain brand is also the reason why many brands are willing to trademark and fight over the use of a certain color (“Cadbury loses legal fight”, 2013; Cunningham, 2017). With increasing brand loyalty, the consumers start to associate the brand color with the assumed quality of that brand’s offerings (Cunningham, 2017). Consumers are also somewhat disagreeing if a brand familiar to them would change their brand color (Cunningham, 2017), implying more on the importance of color associations.

## **2.2 User experience**

In the term “user experience”, often abbreviated as “UX”, the user is the individual or group that uses a product or service, while “user experience” describes that individual or group’s overall subjective experiences that they have while interacting with the product in some way (Babich, 2020; Fredheim, 2011; Voil, 2020). In other words, it’s about what those users perceive and what actions they take (Voil, 2020).

What makes UX important is the fact that if people are not able to use or understand a product or service, the technological marvels it might hold are meaningless, as it fails to deliver in the single most important aspect it should have. Encountering a poor UX is also likely to lead into the customer having an overall poor customer experience as well. (Voil, 2020, p. 16)

There exists a lot of different models that describe the elements that make up the concept of “user experience”, with the most commonly referenced ones being Hassenzahl’s model (2004) and Peter Morville’s model (2004), which especially focuses on website UX. Hassenzahl (2004) divides UX into pragmatic and hedonic categories, based on their attributes. The former is focused on how well the user is able to use the product and achieve their goals, i.e. it focuses on the usability aspect, while the latter is about the subjective sensations that the user has when using the product. Due to UX’s subjective nature, the

designer can only attempt to offer a certain kind of experience for the user (Hassenzahl, 2004).

Peter Morville's UX model (2004) has a bit more levels to it, as it consists of seven different categories that define UX: usable, useful, desirable, valuable, findable, credible and accessible. With these categories Morville (2004) highlights the more detailed levels of usability by separately mentioning "findable" and "accessible", instead of just "usable". The rest of the categories mentioned more or less focus on the feelings and emotions a user has toward a website.

While there is some variance in these proposed UX models, their core content remains the same: the most important elements that make up a UX are things that are related to usability and the feelings and emotions a user has before, during and after using a product (Hassenzahl, 2004; Morville, 2004; see also Fredheim, 2011).

Regardless of the type of product, people are always the most interested in the benefits they'll gain by using a product or a service, thus the interaction with a product or service is always a means to an end, and completely done in the purpose of achieving a goal of some kind. With this in mind, it can be said that the whole UX essentially stems from a need for something and the necessary tasks along the way. (Babich, 2020; Voil, 2020)

### **2.2.1 Designing user experience**

UX is by definition a subjective experience, and for that reason it cannot be fully designed by another person that is not the user themselves. This is due to the fact that every emotional response and opinion a person has toward something is entirely dependent on the context of use and their personal background. For example, a feature or a piece of content that may be entertaining or amusing in one context can be annoying in another. (Fredheim, 2011; Hassenzahl, 2004).

The perception is also based on prior experience and knowledge of the product – things that seemed inconvenient at first may turn into useful ones with acquired knowledge (Fredheim, 2011). Users may also have different expectations for a product (Fredheim, 2011). Due to these possible variables present in each user, the design process for UX is always based on

presumptions, and the designer can only aim to affect the user in the intended ways – the actual outcome is never for certain, however (Fredheim, 2011; Hassenzahl, 2004).

UX, although essentially about the user, affects more than just them, as it has an indirect effect on other stakeholders as well. However, in an ideal case, the design process of a product or service's UX should be user-centric, as this is a lot more likely to result in offering a good experience for the user. The opposite of this would be self-oriented design – designing something without properly thinking about the end user, or without testing the UX during development. Testing and researching is particularly important in the design process – even though it is possible to imagine the user's position when using a product, it is not possible to exactly know the experience, as such things are entirely subjective. (Voil, 2020, pp. 24-28) As good UX design is also inclusive and takes into account the physical and other limitations that the end user can possibly have (Voil, 2020, pp. 12-13), it further emphasizes the need for testing.

Keeping to user-centric design can best be achieved by keeping the actual user in mind throughout the design process (Voil, 2020). The designer should have a good understanding of the end user and what they aspire to actually achieve by using the product or service, and observe them testing the product in realistic usage situations in order to get relevant feedback (Babich, 2020; Voil, 2020). In addition, as designs are rarely perfect in one go, multiple iterations with user feedback are ideal. In order to be effective, these iterations should be done with enough care; what is the focus of each, what the learning outcomes were, and how they can be improved upon. (Voil, 2020, pp. 24-30)

The perceptions and actual emotions of the user when experiencing a product are also to be considered when defining a smooth UX. These experiences can be divided into several subcategories, from a momentary experience or the distinct moment of using the product, all the way to cumulative experience or the feelings the user has accumulated about the product after a certain time. (Voil, 2020, pp. 24-28)

### **2.2.2 Usability in user experience context**

UX consists of a number of different things, and one of the commonly acknowledged parts of it is the usability of the product (Hassenzahl, 2004; Morville, 2004), even to the extent that it is often wrongly used interchangeably with the term “user experience”.

Although there exist many different ways to test the usability of a product, it is still not entirely free of subjectivity, as it is also dependent on the context, the user and their goal (Soegaard, 2020). Despite this, there are general rules that often do describe accurately whether something is usable, which include the ease of completing tasks and achieving the goal and the learnability of the product (Soegaard, 2020). These are often measured with the help of various performance metrics (Albert et al., 2013).

In the context of web development, the things that affect usability include a number of things not present in e.g. physical products. These include the hosting server and its potential downtime, loading speed of pages, the correct usage of HTML (e.g. utilizing ALT-tags and semantic HTML5 tags), helpfulness of 404 pages and how the website has been indexed by search engines. In addition, the various decisions related to visual design affect how the user is able to navigate the page and how accessible it is. (Soegaard, 2020)

### **2.2.3 Visual design in user experience context**

Visual design is about choosing the appropriate colors, layout and other content in a product so that it will be accessible and easy to understand, while offering an appealing interface (Voil, 2020, p. 108). General visual design rules apply in most cases, such as websites; for example, the content should follow the rule of aligning content in a grid format, so that the user is able to make sense of the design and focus on the content (Voil, 2020, p. 108). There should also be an element of consistency, as giving way to too much variation in design may lead to the user getting confused (Babich, 2020). This lack of consistency in design would also be a negative thing for ensuring the best possible brand experience (Wheeler, 2012, pp. 26-30; see also Iglesias et al., 2011; see also Schmitt et al. 2009).

While visual design is not the only thing affecting UX, it has a significant impact on it (Sánchez-Franco et al., 2013; Voil, 2020, p. 18). A visually pleasing user interface also works

as a way of giving the user a more pleasant UX, as people are naturally more motivated to find their way through the needed tasks in an environment that is perceived as visually appealing (Voil, 2020, p. 18). The visual design of a product also directly affects how useful something is perceived as and how well the users feel it helps them achieve their goals (Sánchez-Franco et al., 2013; Tractinsky et al., 2000), as well as even potentially having an effect on the accuracy of actual task performance (Schaik & Ling, 2005).

In fact, in previous research by Tractinsky and their colleagues (2000), the results indicate that even obvious non-critical usability issues of a product were almost completely ignored when paired with a visually appealing user interface, as the judgement about usability was actually based on the aesthetics instead of the actual usability. However, tests on the presence of critical usability problems in the context of a website, i.e. problems that completely prevent the user from achieving their goals, show that these kinds of severe problems still affect the perceived usability despite appealing visuals (Lindgaard & Dudek, 2002). Conversely, if a website is considered to be aesthetically appealing, usability issues do not have an impact on this perception (Lindgaard & Dudek, 2002).

As websites are very visual mediums of information, making sure that a user gets a positive first impression when entering a website should be a priority, as the initial emotional responses occur in just 3-4 milliseconds (Lindgaard & Dudek, 2002), while the visual appeal of a website may be evaluated in 50 milliseconds (Lindgaard et al., 2006). As Lindgaard and Dudek suggest (2002), failing to deliver a positive first impression may lead to the user immediately clicking away from the site, which may have negative consequences to the company, especially in a more competed market. If the user still decides to stay on the website despite the lackluster first impression, the phenomenon of confirmation bias may appear; the user may start judging the website on the basis of the bad first impression, searching for aspects that would support this negative emotion (Lindgaard & Dudek, 2002).

Staying in the context of websites and their UX design, the F-shaped viewing pattern, discovered in a study by Nielsen Norman Group (2017), can become a problem that occurs due to poor visual design, if the placement of content is not carefully planned. It is especially prominent on webpages that are text-heavy (Djamasbi et al., 2011). The F-shaped viewing pattern describes the pattern in which the user scans a webpage, first focusing on the

topmost part, scanning a few horizontal lines under it and finally glancing at the long vertical line on the left, which essentially leads to most of the content getting ignored by the user (Nielsen Norman Group, 2017). In an attempt to prevent this, the visual design should focus on creating clear points of entry for the user by following the principles of visual hierarchy (Djamasbi et al., 2011). Placing related information in the proximity of these points of entry makes it more likely for users to pay attention to this information (Djamasbi et al., 2011).

In order to ensure an overall better UX on a website, the placement of important content should also be considered. Rather than just avoiding the F-shaped viewing pattern by following visual hierarchy principles, an emphasis should also be placed on laying the most enticing information above-the-fold, as this content usually receives the most attention. While the attention of a website user has somewhat spread more on the page than it did in the past, still 57% of the user's attention time focuses on the content that is visible without scrolling, while the first three screenfuls receive 81% of their attention. (Fessenden, 2018; see also Desheep, 2021; see also Djamasbi et al., 2011)

#### **2.2.4 Measuring and testing user experience**

User experience is a wide concept that has many layers to it. Albeit extremely important, the usability of a product is not everything that matters in UX, but the overall feelings and emotions that arise from using it – even a product with subpar usability can be perceived as offering a satisfying UX if the visuals of it are good enough (Tractinsky et al., 2000). While the existing models for UX experience vary in content, the core message of them is still essentially the same – UX consists of usability and the feelings and emotions the user has when encountering it (Hassenzahl, 2004; Morville, 2004; see also Fredheim, 2011).

Because the concept of UX is so vast, when evaluating the UX of a product, the UX metrics used should include a variety of different things to provide a complete image of the perceived subjective experience, and include both qualitative and quantitative data. The chosen metrics should be based on the end goals of targeted users, as aspects such as the frequency of use and the product's overall purpose significantly affect the relevance of different metrics. The most important metric categories are usually related to performance

and user satisfaction, which are both measured with their own sub-metrics. (Albert et al., 2013)

Commonly used performance metrics include task success, time on task, errors, efficiency and learnability (Albert et al., 2013). While performance metrics are great for benchmarking the overall performance of the user and product, and provide quantitative data, they fail to explain the underlying reasons for problems and phenomena (Albert et al., 2013), thereby not giving as much insights into the designs process (Nielsen, 2012). They also only focus on the technical usability aspect of the UX, which does not cover all of what UX consists of – in reality, most of the UX is formed by the hedonic attributes of a product (Fredheim, 2011; Hassenzahl, 2004; Morville, 2004).

Conversely, the metrics related to user satisfaction are focused on the emotions and feelings of the user during, while and after using the product, and as such, performance-related data should be paired with self-reported data related to satisfaction, which can provide more qualitative data (Albert et al., 2013). By combining these two types of data, a more thorough insight about the overall experience can be reached. The resulting data includes both independent and dependent variables, with independent variables including the basic attributes of the user and the product, and dependent variables consisting of e.g. the completion time of tasks, success rate and the overall user satisfaction (Albert et al., 2013).

While the viewpoint of the potential user can be imagined to a certain degree, it is important to test the UX of a product in practice during the planning and production phase (Babich, 2020; Voil, 2020, pp. 24-28). Testing of the UX can be done with multiple methods, from empirically gathering data to the more subjective approaches (Albert et al., 2013; Voil, 2020, pp. 45-46). Methods of gathering empirical data include observing research participants in either a lab setting or in context, using more modern technology such as eye-tracking tools (Albert et al., 2013; Voil, 2020, pp. 45-46), or using the various different available analytics tools. Useful ways for gathering subjective, self-reported data would include conducting interviews and questionnaires (Albert et al., 2013; Voil, 2020, pp. 45-46).

Testing the UX should happen on a carefully selected focus group; they should reflect who the actual user of the product is likely going to be, as the data gathered is going to be more

relevant for the design process (Voil, 2020, p. 40). The focus group does not necessarily have to have a large sample size, as it has been argued that if the product is not considered to be used in a context of life and death, a smaller focus group will also often suffice (Voil, 2020, p. 116-119).

In fact, a focus group consisting of only two to five people is often enough to identify the most important issues of a product (Nielsen, 2012; Nielsen & Landaurer, 1993). Even if the product requires perfecting the design to absolute perfection, conducting multiple tests with a small focus group instead of a one large test is still considered to yield more effective improvements, as the amount of possible issues found within one iteration does not significantly improve with a bigger sample size (Nielsen & Landauer, 1993).

### **3 Website design process**

#### **3.1 Commissioning company introduction**

The commissioning company was Pieni Eläinkauppa, a Finnish pet and pet supplies store located in Kuopio. Their products consist of pet food, pet supplies, aquarium products and fish – in addition to these, they also serve their customers with a wide variety of different services meant to make life easier for both the owner and their pet.

To begin with, Pieni Eläinkauppa already had an online presence as they had Facebook and Instagram accounts and a website. While their social media accounts were actively updated and the content reflected their brand, their website was outdated and did not meet modern standards design-wise. The website was also lacking informative content, which resulted in their customers contacting them via phone to make enquiries. From the screenshot of their website, it can be observed that they originally only had two subpages and hardly any text content (figure 1).



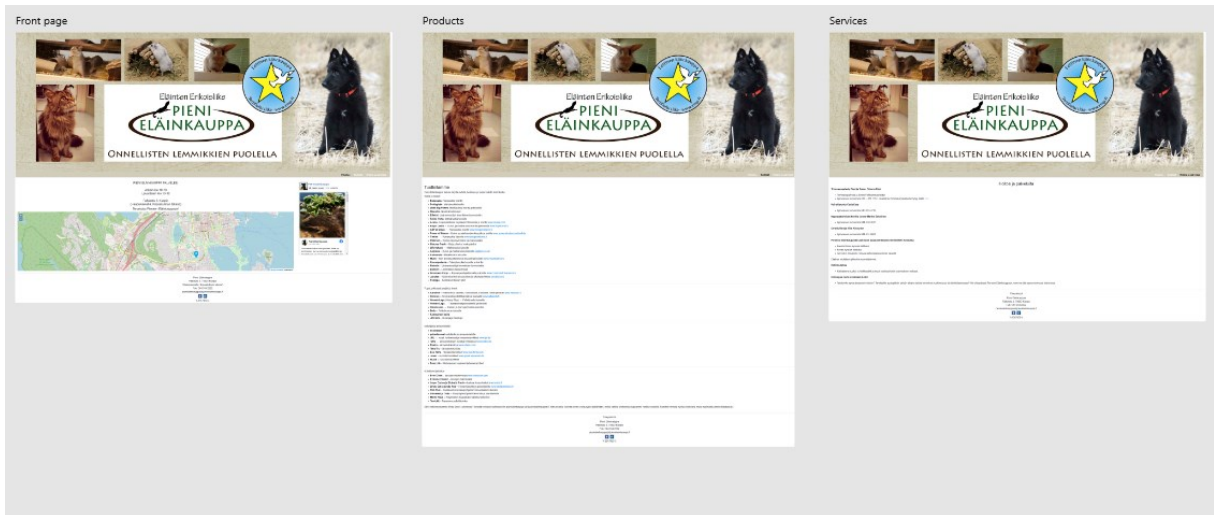


Figure 1. Screenshots of the commissioning company's current website and all of its subpages.

The company only sells their products at their physical store location and as such, they do not have an ecommerce store.

### 3.2 Consulting with the commissioning company

The design process for the updated website was begun by first consulting with the commissioning company about their wishes for the website, both in terms of its visual appearance and contents. As the branding on a company website should be in line with the branding on other customer touchpoints, it was essential to make sure that aspects such as color and other visuals were considered and that the commissioning company itself would also see the website as an extension of their brand. This consultation was conducted via a Zoom call, during which notes about the wishes of the company were made by the author. Throughout the overall design process the rest of the communication with the company happened via email.

During the call, the commissioning company stated that their website should become more informative, be easy to update and be more modern. As the currently available kinds of fish were constantly changing, a special request was made that the list of fish should be easy to keep up-to-date. They also stated that the website should preferably use the same color scheme as their company logo, which in this case consisted of color HEX codes #33673C,

#301505 and #000000. Although the company does not have an ecommerce store at the moment, they stated that they were not interested in expanding the sales of their goods online, but rather have their website be a source of current information. Based on consulting the company the content that should be included on the website culminated into the following list:

- **Services**
  - Introduction, prices
  - Pet hotel services for small animals (rabbits etc.)
  - Small pet care services (nail clipping)
  - Pet nanny services
- **Brands**
  - Links to brand websites
  - Breeder club/loyalty cards
- **Introduction of the company**
  - Personnel
  - Highlighting the presence of a brick-and-mortar store
  - Pictures of the store (old, new)
- **Contact details**
  - Map
  - Driving instructions
- **Animals**
  - Caring instructions
  - Introducing different animals
- **Aquariums**
  - List of fish
  - How to take care of an aquarium
  - Setting up an aquarium

The link tree and overall structure of the website would later be based on this list of content.

It was agreed that the actual textual content to be included on the website would be considered once the design itself was complete, and that it could be worked on together as well. Until then, placeholder texts were used.

Although the company offers services which could potentially benefit from an online booking system, the varying circumstances that needed to be taken into consideration were said to prevent this level of automation, as the service providers needed to be able to make bookings on a case-by-case basis.

Due to the need to be able to update the website easily and its other technical benefits, it was decided that WordPress content management system would be used in the creation of the new website. This decision was backed up by the fact that WordPress is the world's most popular content management system and is used by a plethora of major international companies as a way of powering up their websites (Chakarov, 2021). The commissioning company's representative was also familiar with this system beforehand.

### **3.3 Designing stage**

After consulting with the commissioning company, the actual design process for the new website could begin. The main tool used in the design process was Affinity Designer, a vector-based design tool that allows for easy creation of design mockups and photo alteration, among other things. In addition to the company's own wishes concerning the website, the theoretical background study about UX and branding on a website was constantly kept in mind whilst making various design decisions.

To ensure the contempt of the commissioning company, the design was sent to them via email during the mockup design process so that they would have the opportunity to point out things that they would like to see added or altered.

Before making any digital design version of the site, quick mockup designs were sketched to a notebook. After these rough sketches the design process moved to Affinity Designer. The first designs that were sketched were not shared with the commissioning company, as they were considered to be more "idea-opening" types of designs, rather than the actual design

(figure 2). Regardless, these first designs also used the commissioning company's brand colors and tried to bring out both the playful side and the more professional side of the business, as per the instructions that the company had given during the consultation call. Chosen fonts and other elements were used to emphasize these qualities. This applied to later designs as well.

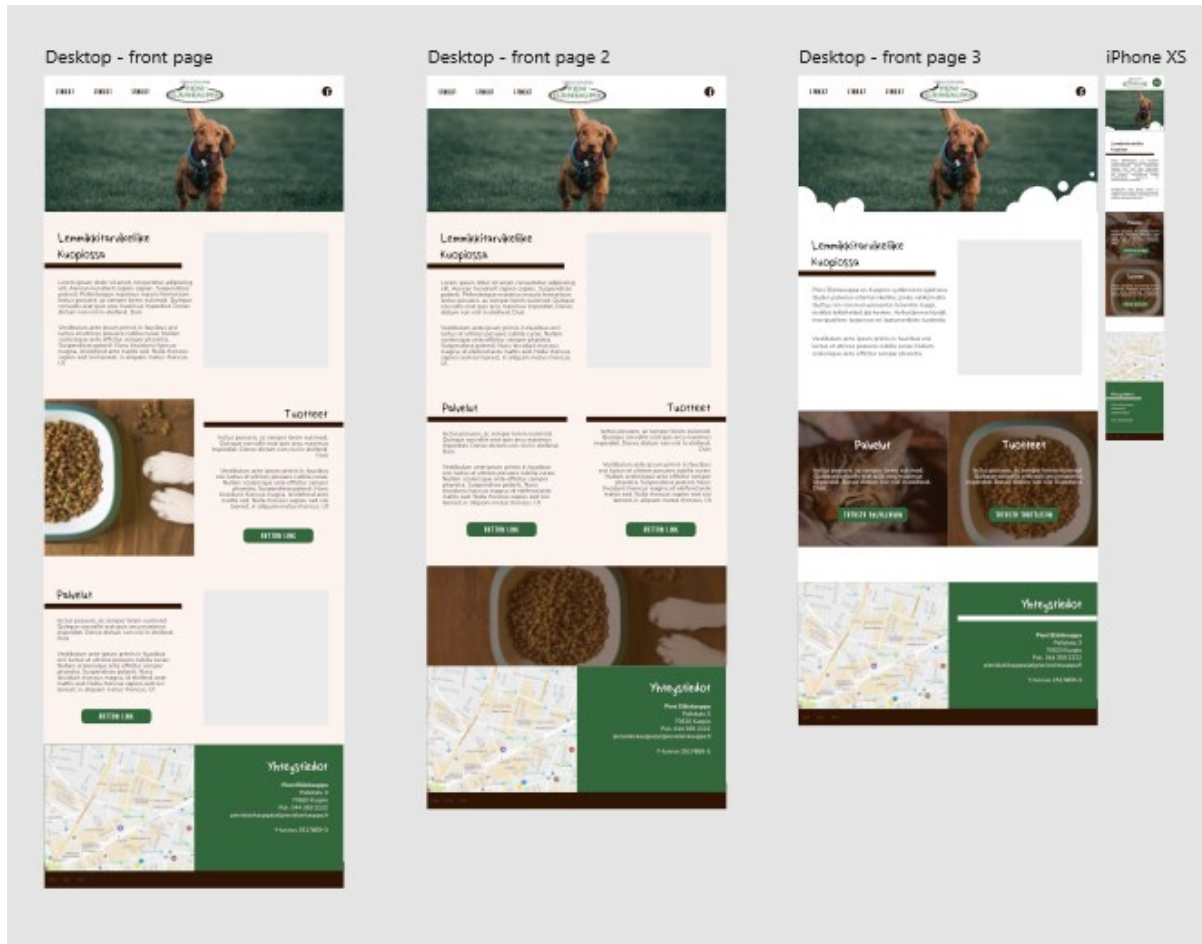


Figure 2. First concept designs for the website.

After making these first concept designs, the creation of the actual design began. Borrowing from the concept designs the same color scheme was still used, utilizing the commission company's brand colors. The structure was also kept similar – however, the design became a lot airier as it had more whitespace around elements. The way of presenting the company's logo also changed into a more imaginative one – instead of simply placing the logo on the top menu bar, it was placed on a ribbon-like shape that pops out from the top of the page (figure 3).

The font chosen for the body text was Nunito Sans, the font of top menu links and some other button links was Amatic and all of the headings used the font Oswald in varying sizes, depending on placement. Both Oswald and Nunito Sans are sans-serif fonts, which are easy to read and have a clean look and as such, they were deemed as a good choice for main text content. Amatic was chosen for its playful yet user-friendly qualities – it looks handwritten but is still easy to read, and it also includes Nordic letters.

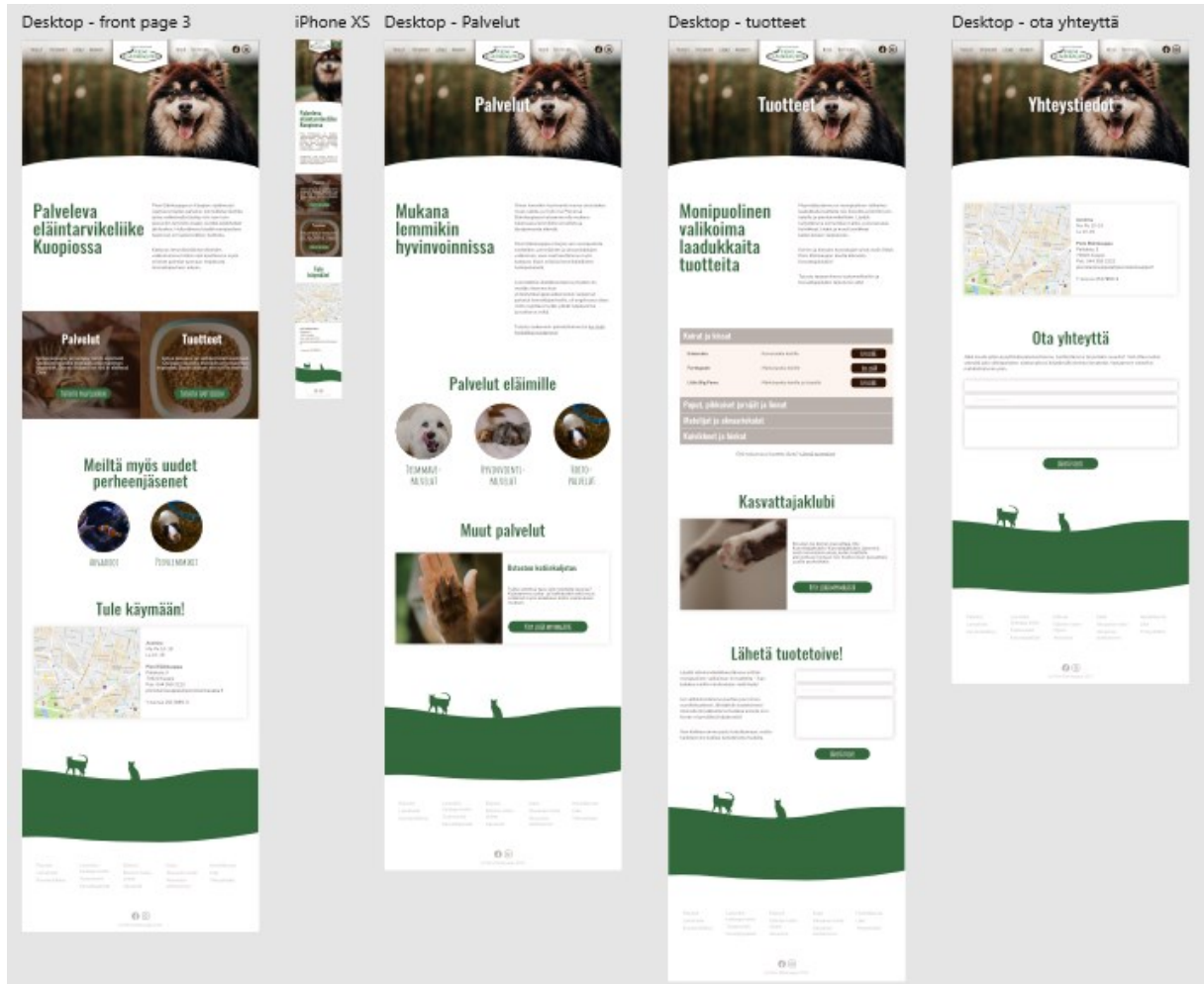


Figure 3. Some of the new website designs that were used to create the website.

Rather than having straight lines all around the page between elements, the bottom of the header image has a curved shape to further bring out the lighthearted and more down-to-earth personality of the brand by breaking away from uniform elements. The concept design with the bubble shapes (rightmost desktop design on figure 2) worked as a basis for this, although the shape got a lot more simplified. While in the concept design the bottom of the page, i.e. the footer, was a green block with a regular shape, the new design had a green

shape with cats. This footer better matched the company's offering and brand personality. Due to changing the shape and purpose of this footer element, the map to the store and their contact details were moved to another, separate element. In addition to changing the shape of the footer, links to all of the website's most important links were added under the green cat shape to enhance search engine optimization as well as add some whitespace onto the bottom of the page.

Most of the subpages for the website were initially designed on Affinity Designer, although some were left to just the actual implementation stage as they would consist of elements already used on other subpages. All images used in the design program mockups were copyright-free images from free online picture databases.

During the design process the design was validated by sending it to the commissioning company for approval via email. The commissioning company was happy with the design and commented that it looked nice and clean but made an additional request of adding more information about small pets and aquariums to the front page, as at that point the front page did not include links to those subpages. The designs in figure 3 are the updated version that includes links to these subpages.

### **3.4 Implementation of the design on the web**

After making the mockup design for the website on Affinity Designer, the creation process moved on to the author's personal web host as the website was to be created there to enable practical UX tests later.

As stated before, the WordPress content management system was used to build the website due to its popularity, ease of use and efficiency in creating websites. Since building websites from scratch on WordPress would require excessive amounts of front and back-end coding, a page builder tool called Elementor was also used in the creation of the website. This tool comes with an extensive library of page elements that can then be freely customized by adjusting settings or using the CSS coding language. These elements can be added to the website in a simple drag-and-drop manner unless heavy customization is needed.

Making a WordPress site comes with some other perks as well; since it is an incredibly popular choice for creating websites (Chakarov, 2021), there exists a massive number of freely available add-ons that allow for an easy implementation of various features. The most important ones are the ones that optimize the performance of the site, but as their caching is not optimal for constant major changes in the website's layout, these kinds of add-ons were only implemented once the site was complete and moved to the commissioning company's web host. As such, the immediately added add-ons were more focused on the content (such as a street map feature), security (limiting login attempts) and overall functions of the site (e.g. ease of updating content for the end user).

Due to the number of subpages and increased amount of content on the website, a dropdown menu was used as the main top menu for the desktop version of the site (figure 4). A separate menu was later created for mobile users. With a dropdown menu the content can be easily accessed, even if it is buried several subpages deep into the site's hierarchy.

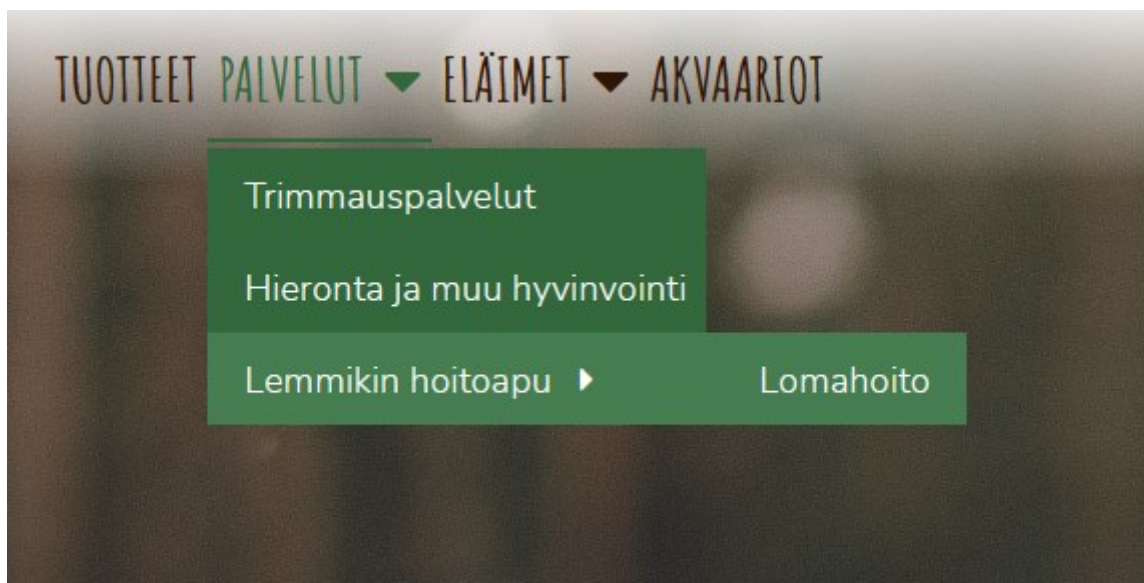


Figure 4. The new site's dropdown menu and its deepest hierarchy level.

A feature that was specifically asked for by the commissioning company was the ability to update the list of fish with ease, as the available fish are constantly changing. Even though the commissioning company's representative was already familiar with using WordPress and as such, was likely to have a rather good understanding of how to update content on a website in a regular way, special effort was put into creating a system where the updates

could be done by almost anyone. For this reason, an add-on “Advanced custom fields” was installed, combined with an element where the list of fish would appear on the site and configured in such a way that the content of said element could be altered directly from the dashboard of WordPress (figure 5).

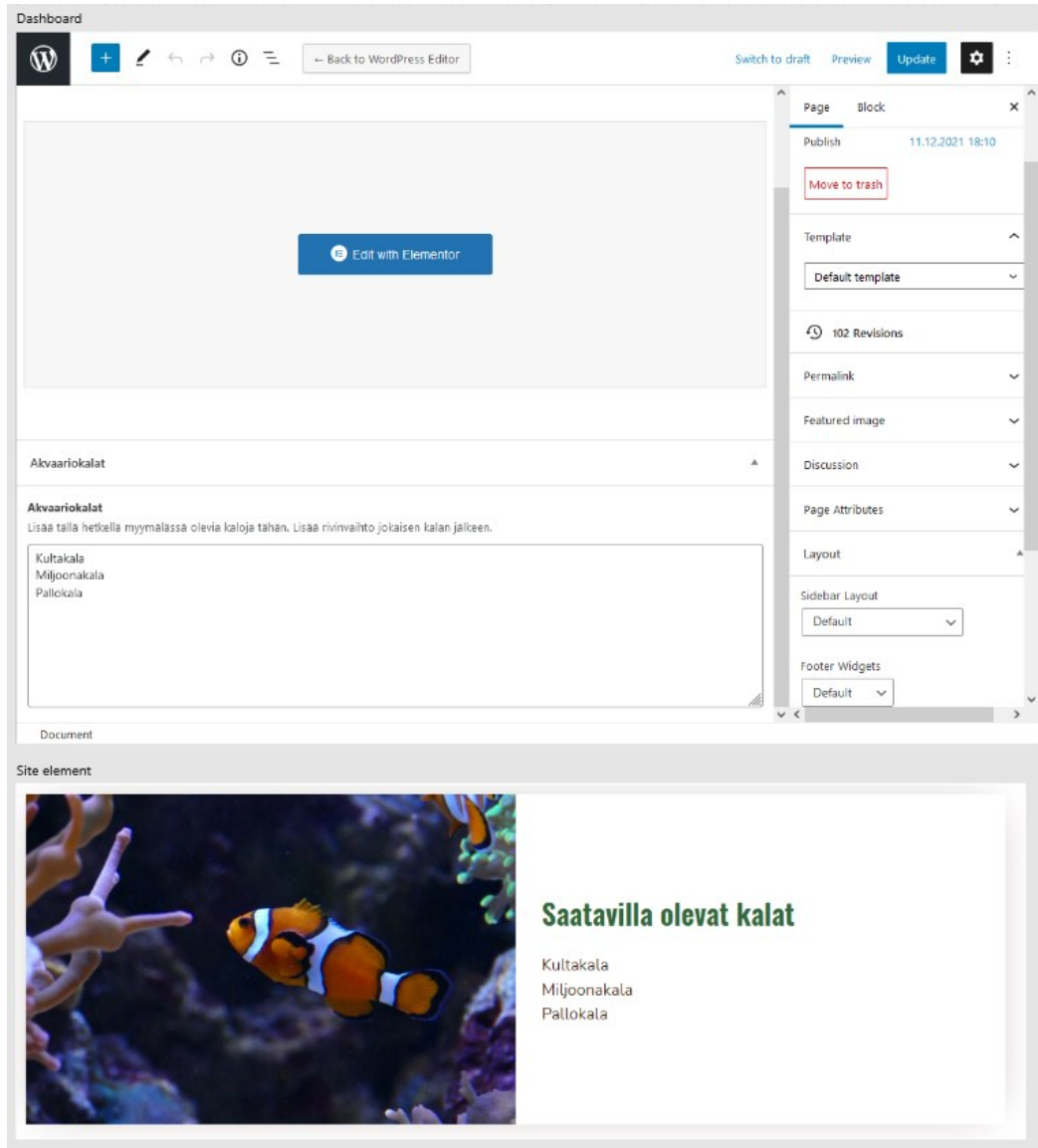


Figure 5. The dashboard of WordPress and the element where the field “Akvaariokalat” is connected to.

The commissioning company’s current website’s only methods for contacting them were the company’s phone number and email address – there was no direct way of e.g. sending them a message through the site, but instead the visitor had to open their email client and manually contact them that way. Had the visitor wanted to contact them directly online,



they would have had to use one of their social media accounts. As this can be rather cumbersome for a visitor, two contact forms were added to the site. One of the contact forms is dedicated to general inquiries while the other is for submitting product suggestions; in practice there is little difference in which one is used to contact the store, as the only thing that changes is the subject of the email received by the commissioning company. The general inquiry form was added to the contact detail page of the site, while the product suggestion form was included into the product page.

The current website's header image (i.e. the image on the top of the page) featured a wide variety of animals, and the commissioning company wanted the new website design to reflect this kind of idea as well. This wish was met by making the front page's header image change every 4 seconds to a picture of another animal. In addition to this, the header images of some subpages were made to reflect the content on said page – e.g. the header image of a page about aquariums was made to use a picture of an aquarium.

Like was mentioned in the introduction, not having a customized 404 error page is a missed opportunity for a company and can lead to the visitor leaving the site (Berg, 2019; Clockwork, n.d.; Stable WP, n.d.). Their current website was lacking this error page, and in the case of a broken link or a typo the visitor would have faced the default 404 page of the browser. For the new website, a 404 page matching the look of the website was created, and it included a list of links to guide the visitor to an existing part of the website (figure 6).

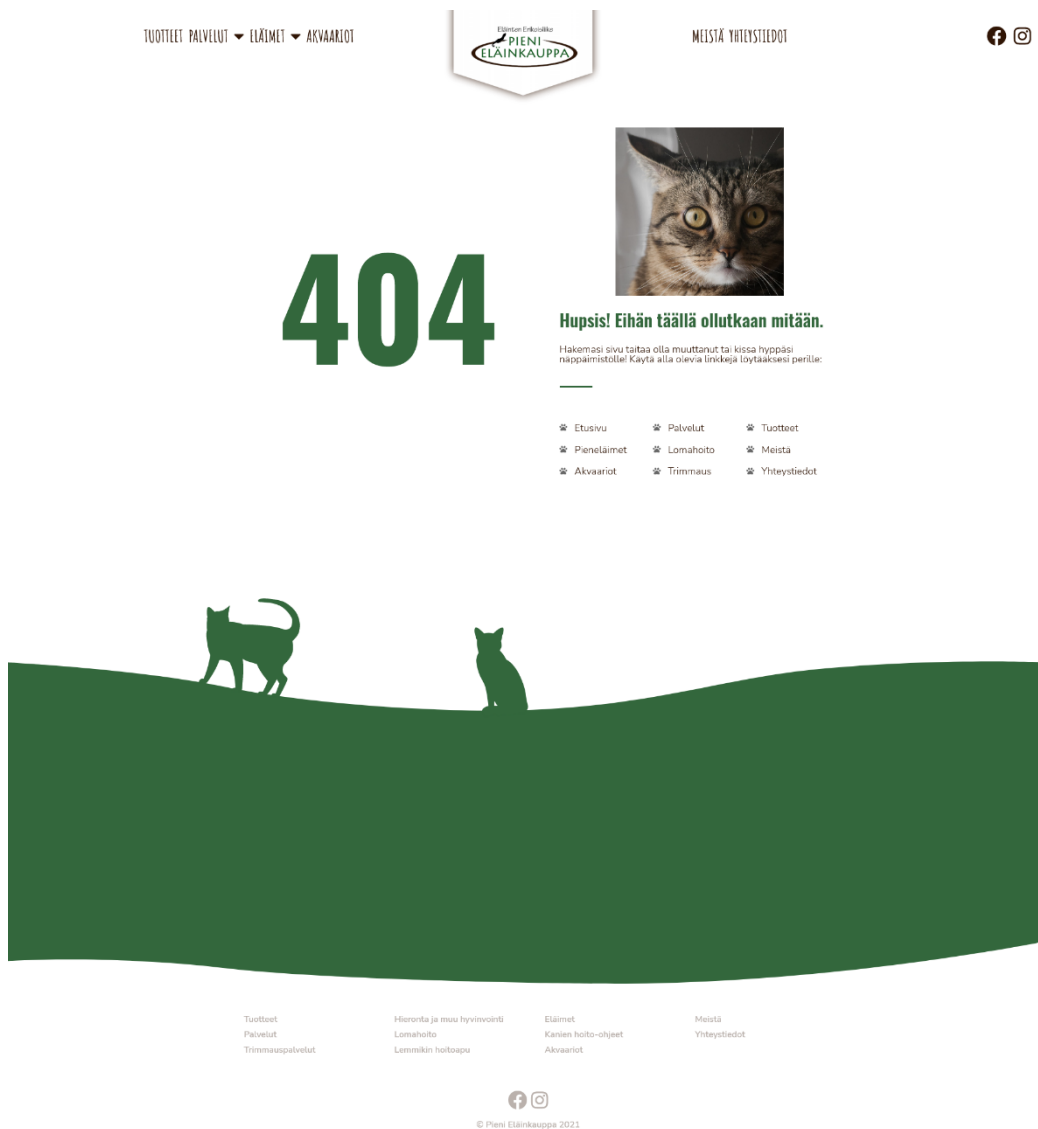


Figure 6. A custom 404 page that is more on brand and has a list of links as well.

During the creation process of the new design, carefully crafted placeholder texts and pictures were used. These materials were also used when measuring the perceived branding of the new website and when conducting the UX tests, as the commissioning company did not provide their own materials to replace them.

### 3.4.1 Ensuring responsiveness

A website nowadays is required to work on any device without any problems, and the site's elements should work in a responsive and adaptive way to support that. This is mandatory both because the majority of internet traffic comes from mobile devices (Statista, 2021), and

also because search engines rank websites based on their responsiveness – sites that do not work well on mobile devices are at a risk of not being indexed at all.

The commissioning company’s current site was already mobile responsive, and the new site was made to work well on any device as well. Some elements change their size based on the screen size of the visitor’s device, while others alter their appearance from e.g. a horizontal layout to a vertical one (figure 7).

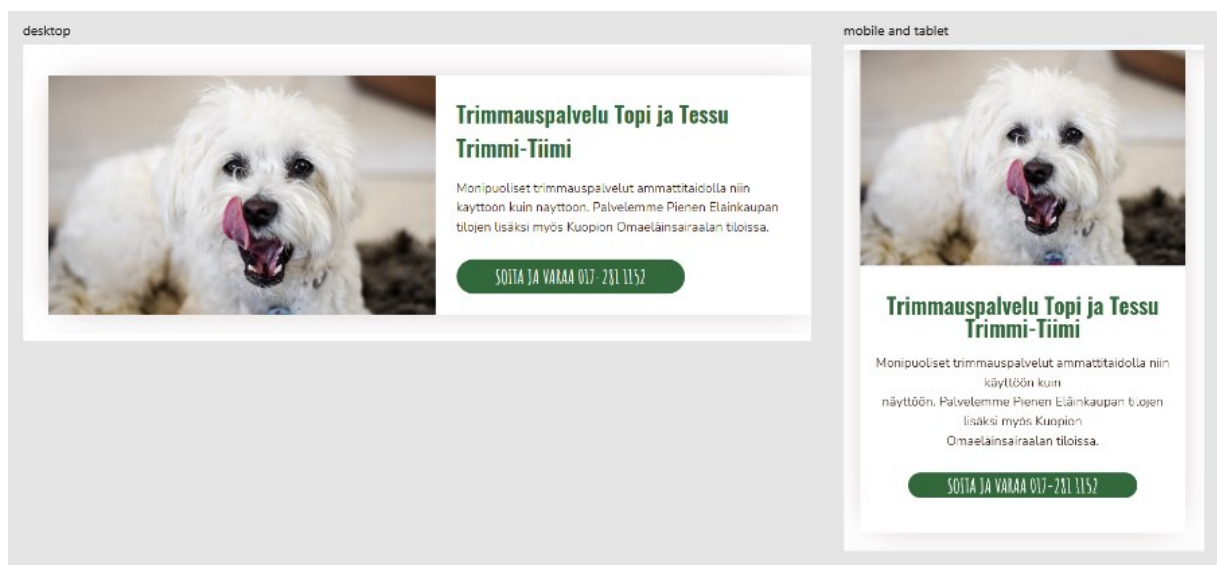


Figure 7. A card-like element changes its layout based on the screen size.

#### 4 Research methods and analysis

While the nature of this thesis is practice-based, the outcome of the shown practice, i.e. the revised company website, will be observed with the help of collected research data. The research is used to measure the brand perception and the quality of the UX of both the company’s current website and the new design. Brand perception will be measured and quantified by two using online surveys to gather people’s opinions and will cover aspects such as brand personality and impression about the company. The quality of UX will be assessed by measuring the task success rate in the UX tests and by analyzing the results of the self-reported surveys that are filled by the participants.

The possible improvements achieved by creating the new website design will be observed by reflecting its research data to the data collected about the current website. All data will be collected before replacing the commissioning company's current website with the new one by using the author's own web hosting space to host the new website, or by showing screenshots of the website designs.

#### **4.1 Mixed method approach**

The research method chosen for this study is a mixed method approach which combines both qualitative and quantitative techniques for data collection (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 152), which are both usually needed especially for rating the UX (Albert et al., 2013), as it consists of both the completely objective performance data and the subjective feelings and emotions of the user. However, a clear emphasis is placed on collecting the subjective data in a quantitative way when possible – as such, a clear majority of the collected data is quantitative, with the exception of one survey question. This approach was chosen to have the best chance of being able to compare the gathered data.

##### **4.1.1 Qualitative**

Qualitative data is non-numeric and is based on words (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 482), and thus cannot directly be numerically analyzed. Means of collecting qualitative data include e.g. interviews and surveys with open-ended questions (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 480).

In the context of this research, qualitative data concerns measuring the UX of both the current and updated website with the help of self-reported data, collected in the form of online questionnaires. The participants are asked to fill this questionnaire immediately after UX testing has been conducted (post-study ratings), as this is a commonly used method in UX testing (Albert et al., 2013, p. 125). During this research, the links to these questionnaires are provided to them after the test. While the questions are focused on discovering the subjective feelings of the participant, the method of answering them is mostly quantitative. This is achieved by utilizing a 5-point Likert scale, which is commonly used to collect self-reported data in UX testing (Albert et al., 2013, pp. 123-124). However, there is also a place for the participant to freely write their thoughts and opinions, which provides completely

qualitative data. This question is included in the survey to make sure that the participants are able to express their subjective feelings toward all the aspects of UX in case they are not explicitly covered by the close-ended questions.

#### **4.1.2 Quantitative**

Quantitative data is data that is numerical and standardized, and which can be analyzed with the help of e.g. diagrams (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 482). This kind of data can be further divided into different data types, with numerical data and categorical data forming the main groups, and further subdivided into interval data, ratio data, dichotomous data, nominal data, ranked data, continuous data and discrete data, depending on the nature of the data collected (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 417).

Observation and questionnaires with close-ended questions are the main means used to gather quantitative data in this thesis. Observation is used in the UX testing, as it allows to get performance data regarding e.g. the success rate for completing tasks (Albert et al., 2013, pp. 63-95). Observation results in quantitative data, which by nature cannot provide answers to reasons behind occurrences and actions (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 300). To make sure that the made observations are correct and that the gathered performance data is as accurate as possible, a screen recording software is used to record the testing situation. In the testing situation, the successful completion of tasks is recorded by the observer by filling out a form, which provides the performance data used in the evaluation of the UX.

Online questionnaires are used to study both the branding and UX of the site. The branding-related questionnaire is concerned in studying how people perceive the branding on both the current and the new site, using 5-point Likert scales and thus providing quantitative data. Most of the UX-related subjective data is also collected by using the same type of Likert scales for ease of data analysis and comparison.

## 5 Measuring the outcome of the project

### 5.1 Branding survey

As a way of rating and comparing the branding on the commissioning company's website, two different branding-related surveys were conducted. The first of these surveys focused on collecting data about respondents' opinions about the current website, while the second survey was about the new website design. The respondents did not have a chance of receiving any compensation for answering the survey.

The questions themselves were the same on both surveys and focused on finding out the overall brand impression that people got by just looking at the website. The survey also included questions about assessing the brand's perceived personality based on the website's visuals. The Finnish translations of all survey questions are included in the thesis's appendices as all respondents were Finnish (see Appendix 1).

The surveys were not shared to people already familiar with the website or the company e.g. people following the commissioning company's Facebook page, as the author wanted to collect the most neutral opinions possible. Had the surveys been shared to people already emotionally invested in the company, the possibility for the answers to be heavily biased would have been incredibly high, as the perception of the website and brand would likely be affected by their familiarity and past experiences with the company itself.

The branding surveys were conducted with the help of an online survey tool Webropol. The links to both surveys were shared on public communities, with the other community being on Facebook and the other one on Reddit. The Facebook community was one that is targeted at career-focused young women, and the Reddit community is meant for everyone in Finland. Overall, these communities had a potential audience of over 200 thousand members.

The data collected on both surveys was completely anonymous and provided quantitative data with the help of 5-point Likert scales (scale 1-5). In this scale the value of 1 represented total disagreement with the particular question or statement, while 5 represented total

agreement with it. In addition to inquiring about the general impression of the company, the survey also included a question where the respondents were asked to rate how well different personality traits describe the brand. The personality traits presented in the question were based on Aaker's (1997) studies on brand personality. All questions in the survey were mandatory to answer.

In the case of both versions, the websites were presented in the form of screen captured images of complete webpages instead of providing links. This was done as a way of ensuring that respondents would see the websites in a similar manner, and would not e.g. decide not to visit the website due to the added trouble. This is also used to prevent a bias in the number of pages seen, as all respondents would be presented with pictures of the same number of webpages.

### 5.1.1 Survey about the current website and its results

On the survey about the old website and its branding, the survey included screenshots of all the subpages as well as the front page as the website was very limited in content – all in all, three screenshots were used.

Although the survey was publicly shared on large online communities, the number of responses was quite limited with 31 recorded responses. However, the results from these respondents were quite consistent, and provided a good overview of the general opinion regarding the site. Only some of the questions and their responses are covered in this part of the thesis. Full results of the survey can be found in the appendices (see Appendix 2, tables 1-4).

Question/statement	Min value	Max value	Average	Median	Standard Deviation
I get a positive impression of this company	1	5	2,7	3	1,2
This company feels professional	1	5	2,2	2	1,0

Table 1. Survey questions and results regarding the overall impression and the perception of professionalism based on the current website.

The survey started off by asking whether the respondent gets an overall positive impression of the company based on the screenshots presented to them. From the results of this survey, it can be immediately observed that the overall perception formed on the website's visuals is leaning toward a more negative impression, as the average response to this question was 2,7 (table 1). There was some disagreement within responses as the results included values from both extremes of the scale, but with a standard deviation of 1,2 it can be said that there was a consensus between the respondents. The median answer was 3.

The respondents did not feel that the company seemed very professional, as the average value for it was 2,2 with a standard deviation of 1,0 (table 1). Some respondents still rated the perception of professionalism as 5, but with a median answer of 2 the consensus between respondents was higher than when rating the positive impression.

The appeal of the company was not rated very highly. The average value for rating the appeal of the company was 2,1 (table 2). Once again, some respondents clearly disagreed with the general opinion as the responses also included a rating of 5. However, with a median answer of 2 and a standard deviation of 1,1 the overall responses remained consistent. The appeal of the website's branding was even lower, with an average rating of just 1,8 and a median rating of 2 (table 2). While this was also rated as 5 by some respondent, the standard deviation of 1,1 indicates a consensus between the respondents.

Question/statement	Min value	Max value	Average	Median	Standard Deviation
This company feels appealing to me	1	5	2,1	2	1,1
The branding on the website is appealing	1	5	1,8	2	1,1
How likely would you visit this store based on the website?	1	4	2,1	2	1,0



Table 2. Survey questions and results for rating the appeal of the company, appeal of the website's branding and the likelihood of visiting the store based on the website.

Due to the general purpose of a company's website, i.e. directing visitors into a sales funnel where they would eventually turn into customers, the respondents were also asked how likely they would visit the store based on the judgements made on the website alone. When presenting this question, the respondents were asked to ignore their actual physical location and base their response on the website only.

From a potential sales perspective the responses to this question did not appear very positive, as most respondents did not think that the likelihood of them visiting the store would be very high (table 2). The average rating for this question was only 2,1 with a median of 2. The standard deviation was 1,0, which implies that the respondents generally agreed on this matter. The highest value for this question was 4 while the lowest was 1. However, due to the used sample not consisting of proved potential buyers, the results to this question might also reflect their general interest in the goods available in the store, and not be based on the website's branding visuals.

	1	2	3	4	5	Average	Median
<b>Outdoorsy</b>	22,6%	25,8%	25,8%	16,1%	9,7%	2,6	3
<b>Tough</b>	16,1%	16,1%	22,6%	19,4%	25,8%	3,2	3
<b>Upper class</b>	71 %	22,6%	3,2%	3,2%	0 %	1,4	1
<b>Charming</b>	35,5%	32,3%	16,1%	12,9%	3,2%	2,2	2
<b>Reliable</b>	19,4%	29 %	41,9%	3,2%	6,5%	2,5	3
<b>Intelligent</b>	32,3%	41,9%	22,6%	0 %	3,2%	2,0	2
<b>Successful</b>	54,9%	29 %	12,9%	3,2%	0 %	1,6	1
<b>Daring</b>	38,7%	35,5%	19,4%	6,4%	0 %	1,9	2
<b>Spirited</b>	29 %	25,8%	32,3%	12,9%	0 %	2,3	2
<b>Imaginative</b>	48,4%	32,3%	16,1%	0 %	3,2%	1,8	2
<b>Up-to-date</b>	64,5%	29,1%	3,2%	0 %	3,2%	1,5	1
<b>Down-to-earth</b>	6,4%	12,9%	19,4%	41,9%	19,4%	3,5	4
<b>Honest</b>	3,2%	12,9%	29 %	35,5%	19,4%	3,5	4
<b>Wholesome</b>	6,4%	19,4%	41,9%	22,6%	9,7%	3,1	3
<b>Cheerful</b>	6,5%	25,8%	35,5%	16,1%	16,1%	3,1	3

Table 3. Responses for the perceived brand personality.

From the discussions with the company, it was understood that they wanted their brand to feel easily approachable and not too uptight, but still modern and credible. The responses to the question about perceived brand personality gave some interesting insights into whether

the respondents saw the company's brand in the way they have meant it to be seen as. This question clearly divided the respondents' opinions a lot more than the ones covering more general impressions, as the ratings for some personality traits were spread almost evenly between multiple values (table 3).

The traits where over 50% of the answers either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the suitability of that particular personality trait were up-to-date, imaginative, spirited, daring, successful, intelligent, charming and upper class. The personality traits that were generally deemed as more fitting for the brand personality, receiving an agreement of over 50% were honest and down-to-earth. With the rest of the personality traits the ratings were more evenly distributed or neutral, i.e. focused on value 3.

Overall, the results of this branding-related survey were quite expected as the commissioning company's current website is lacking both content and modern visuals. As has been discussed in the background research part of this thesis, the lack of previous experience with a company results in people basing their judgements mainly on its visual aspects (Ha & Perks, 2005). When the company's visual appeal is subpar, the overall impression is likely to be more negative.

From the results of rating the personality traits, it can be seen that the overall impression of the company is outdated and unimaginative, while they are still appreciated for their honest look and down-to-earth feel. The aim of the improvements was to maintain the positively perceived personality traits while strengthening the still more disagreed ones.

### **5.1.2 Survey about the new website and its results**

The survey about the new website design was conducted by using pictures of the design on Affinity Designer, as the design was yet to be implemented on the new website at this stage. The sample was gathered from the same online communities as with the previous survey by using an open link that any member of those communities could use to answer. As the new website had a lot more content than the old one, not all subpages were included as screenshots on the survey. All in all, four screenshots were used, with three of them matching the ones used on the survey about the old website, and one additional one. The

questions and the order of them were identical to those present in the survey about the current website.

Even though the targeted online communities had a large user base, this survey did not surpass the response rate of the earlier branding survey and received 24 recorded answers. Similarly to the previous survey, the responses were quite consistent with some more extreme polars. The same questions and results that were in the previous section are covered in this part of the thesis. Full results of the survey can be found in the appendices (see Appendix 2, tables 5-8).

Question/statement	Min value	Max value	Average	Median	Standard Deviation
I get a positive impression of this company	3	5	4,3	4	0,6
This company feels professional	2	5	3,9	4	0,9

Table 4. Results of the respondents' impression of the company and the perceived professionalism based on the new website design.

Once again, the first question focused on finding out how positive the impression of the company was for the respondent. Overall, the respondents felt that they got a positive impression of the company, as the ratings reached an average value of 4,3 with a standard deviation of only 0,6 and a median value of 4 (table 4). The lowest rating for this question was 3, so in this case no respondent directly disagreed with this statement.

The results also indicated that the company felt more professional to most of the respondents – the perceived level of professionalism now got an average rating of 3,9 with a median value of 4 and a standard deviation of 0,9 (table 4). The maximum and minimum ratings for this question were 5 and 2 respectively.

Question/statement	Min value	Max value	Average	Median	Standard Deviation
This company feels appealing to me	2	5	3,5	4	1,0

The branding on the website is appealing	2	5	4,0	4	0,8
This company feels easily approachable	3	5	4,1	4	0,6
How likely would you visit this store based on the website?	1	5	3,6	4	1,0

Table 5. Results for the appeal of the company and the website's branding, whether the company felt easily approachable and how likely the respondent would visit the store.

The statements about the overall company appeal and the appeal of the branding on the website were both mostly agreed on. The overall appeal of the company leaned toward a more positive side as the respondents rated the appeal with an average value of 3,5, with a median of 4 and a standard deviation of 1,0 (table 5). The appeal of the branding on the website was rated even more highly as it received an average rating of 4,0 with a standard deviation of just 0,8, showing a general agreement among respondents. The median value for the website's appeal was 4 and with both of these questions the lowest value was 2, meaning that no respondent strongly disagreed with the statements.

Most of the respondents felt that the company seemed very easily approachable with an average rating of 4,1 and a standard deviation of only 0,6, showing a very strong consensus between respondents (table 5). No respondent directly disagreed with the statement as the median value was 4 and lowest value was 3.

The new website design also seemed to work adequately well in leading customers further into the sales funnel. When inquiring whether the respondent would likely visit the actual store location based on the website, the responses varied between both extreme opposites on the scale as the ratings were between 1 and 5 indicating both strong agreement and strong disagreement on the matter (table 5). However, most of the respondents still felt that they would be interested in going to the store as the average rating for this likelihood was 3,6 with a standard deviation of 1,0 and a median value of 4. While the median rating indicates a general interest in visiting the store, having these polar ratings might be an implication of some respondents being more interested in the general offering of the store

than others, as all respondents may not be able to relate to the question if they have no interest in the company's products at all.

	1	2	3	4	5	Average	Median
<b>Outdoorsy</b>	0 %	0 %	25 %	54,2%	20,8%	4,0	4
<b>Tough</b>	45,8%	37,5%	12,5%	4,2%	0 %	1,8	2
<b>Upper class</b>	20,8%	25 %	33,3%	16,7%	4,2%	2,6	3
<b>Charming</b>	0 %	16,6%	29,2%	41,7%	12,5%	3,5	4
<b>Reliable</b>	0 %	8,3%	33,3%	41,7%	16,7%	3,7	4
<b>Intelligent</b>	0 %	25 %	41,7%	29,2%	4,1%	3,1	3
<b>Successful</b>	4,2%	12,5%	41,7%	33,3%	8,3%	3,3	3
<b>Daring</b>	16,6%	29,2%	41,7%	4,2%	8,3%	2,6	3
<b>Spirited</b>	4,2%	16,6%	25 %	41,7%	12,5%	3,4	4
<b>Imaginative</b>	8,3%	33,3%	29,2%	25 %	4,2%	2,8	3
<b>Up-to-date</b>	4,2%	12,5%	20,8%	33,3%	29,2%	3,7	4
<b>Down-to-earth</b>	0 %	12,5%	29,2%	37,5%	20,8%	3,7	4
<b>Honest</b>	0 %	8,3%	20,9%	50 %	20,8%	3,8	4
<b>Wholesome</b>	0 %	4,2%	25 %	45,8%	25 %	3,9	4
<b>Cheerful</b>	0 %	4,2%	20,8%	50 %	25 %	4,0	4

Table 6. Ratings for perceived brand personality based on the new website design.

When rating the brand personality of the company the respondents matched many of the presented personality traits with the brand (table 6). The traits where over 50% of respondents agreed on their suitability were outdoorsy, charming, reliable, spirited, up-to-date, down-to-earth, honest, wholesome, and cheerful. Only one personality trait, tough, was generally disagreed on. The rest of the traits were rated more neutral (overall values closer to 3).

### 5.1.3 Comparison of results

Although both surveys had responses that go to the more extreme polar ratings on the Likert scale, the results can be directly compared by looking at the average rating on each question. This gives a good overview of whether there was a successful improvement in the website's design and the brand impression or not, and how significant the change was. However, as the samples used on both surveys were different, no hard conclusions can be drawn from the results and as such, the results can only work as indicators of potential improvements. Only the questions covered in the previous sections are compared in this part of the thesis.

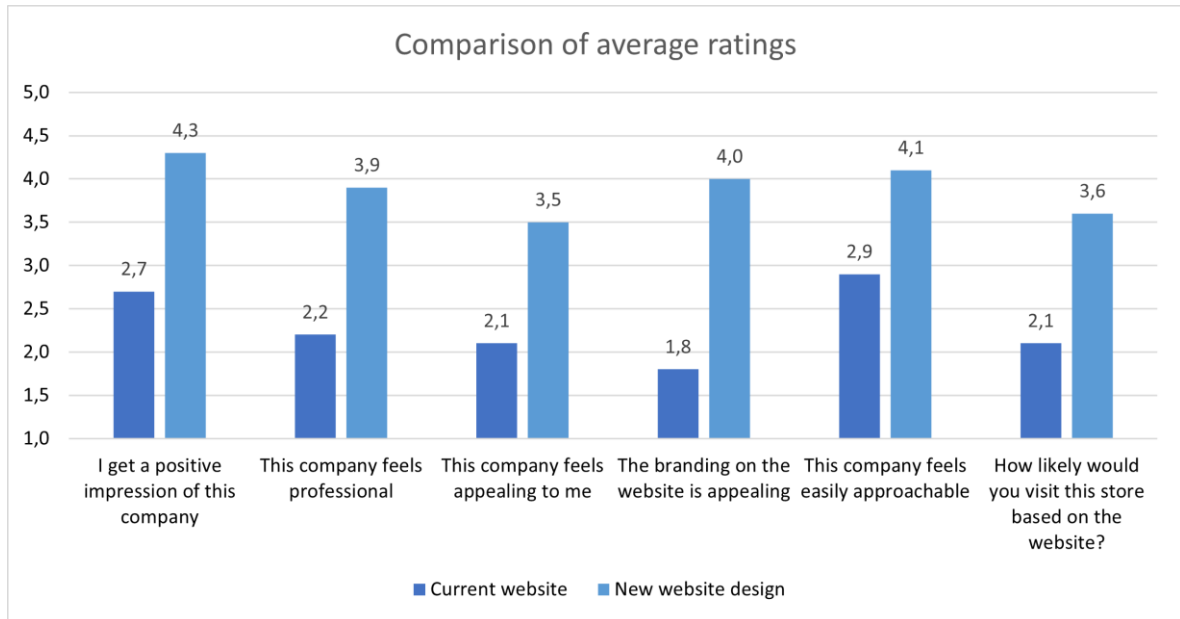


Figure 8. A column chart showing the comparison between given average ratings of selected survey questions.

All results distinctly improved with the new website design (figure 8). With the current website, the respondents evaluated their positive impression of the company with an average rating of 2,7, while with the new website design this score reached an average of 4,3 with minimal standard deviation, showing an increase of 1,5 points on the scale. The respondents also felt that there was a clear change in the perceived level of professionalism, as for the current website this question was given an average rating of 2,2 while the new design improved the results by 1,7 points, reaching an average of 3,9.

With the new design the company itself was perceived as appealing with an average rating of 3,5, while the current design resulted in an overall unappealing impression. The improvement on the appeal of the branding on the website showed the most significant change of all the questions observed here – the appeal of the current website’s branding was extremely low with an average rating of mere 1,8, while the new design managed to push this rating all the way up to 4,0 – a change of 2,2 points on the rating scale, showing compelling evidence of improvement.

While it could be presumed that a more modern and updated look would lower the perception of a company being easily approachable, an opposite effect can be seen from the results; the current website was rated an average value of 2,9 on this matter, while the new

website design was given an average rating of 4,1 – once again showing a significant improvement of 1,2 over the current website.

The result for the likelihood of the respondents visiting the store was no exception to the other questions. The respondents did not feel that they would likely visit the store based on the perception they got from the current website; however, when judging the company based on the new website design, the respondents became a lot more interested in going to the store. This could potentially be an important improvement for the commissioning company, as a website is often the first touchpoint with a customer.

<b>Current website</b>		<b>New website design</b>	
<b>Over 50% agreement</b>	<b>Over 50% disagreement</b>	<b>Over 50% agreement</b>	<b>Over 50% disagreement</b>
honest	up-to-date	outdoorsy	tough
down-to-earth	imaginative	charming	
	spirited	reliable	
	daring	spirited	
	Successful	up-to-date	
	Intelligent	down-to-earth	
	charming	honest	
	upper class	wholesome	
		cheerful	

Table 7. Comparison of how different personality traits were thought to match the company's brand personality.

The company's perceived brand personality also got to enjoy these changes (table 7). The respondents only agreed that the personality traits of honest and down-to-earth accurately described the brand based on the current website, while eight traits were clearly disagreed on. Conversely, thanks to the new website design a total of nine personality traits were perceived as suitable for describing the brand personality of the company, and only one trait had a consensus of disagreement.

To summarize, when looking at the overall results of both surveys it can be observed that the changes made with the new website design yielded very positive results. All survey questions showed a clear improvement in the responses, and none of the average ratings dipped below the value of 3. Conversely, in the survey about the current website all

questions that were covered in detail received an average rating that was below 3 either slightly or significantly. However, it is important to note that the results can only give limited insight into potential improvements. Due to the respondents not being the same in both conducted surveys, the results may not indicate concrete improvements, as the same respondents were not introduced to both versions.

## **5.2 Conducting user experience tests**

The UX tests were conducted on both the current website and the new one, with the same participants completing the UX test on both versions in one sitting. The participants were recruited from acquaintances of the author who had no previous experience of either of the site's versions and represented regular consumers as none of them had a design background. The performance of the participant was recorded by the author by filling out a form as the test went on. The performance was only measured by observing the successful completion of tasks, not by e.g. measuring the time on task or error rate.

The test situations were recorded using a screen recording program to enable the possibility of double checking the recorded performance afterwards. The tests were conducted by using the author's own laptop at the author's own apartment. After testing each version, the participant was asked to fill out a self-reported survey with questions about their opinions and emotions toward the site to provide a more holistic view as well. The participants did not get any compensation for taking part in the test.

The tasks the participants were asked to complete were the same for both UX tests – this meant that due to the limited amount of content on the current website, some of the tasks were not possible to complete. However, these tasks were included to ensure consistency and at least some comparability of the results. Although the performance data of both sites was contrasted against each other, the emphasis for assessing the quality of the UX was on the user's self-reported opinions and feelings, not their performance. These were mostly measured by using 5-point Likert scales – however, the self-reported survey also included a completely open-ended question which gave the participants the chance to freely express their opinions.



This part of the thesis goes through all of the performance data and covers some of the questions in the self-reported survey. The Finnish translations of the questions in the self-reported surveys are included in the appendices (see Appendix 3) as all the participants were Finnish. The full collected data from both self-reported surveys are also included in the appendices (see Appendix 4).

The number of participants in the UX tests was four (4), as it is not mandatory for such a test to have large sample size – it has been said that 75% of problems are found by the first three users (Nielsen, 2012; Nielsen & Landaurer, 1993).

### 5.2.1 User experience on the current website

As mentioned in the previous section, the current website's content was rather limited and as such, not all tasks were possible to complete since the content the user was meant to search for simply did not exist on the site. The participants were informed of this possibility prior to conducting the test. However, these kinds of tasks were also recorded. The performance of the participants was measured during the tests by the author by filling out a survey created for this purpose – these results were then used to observe the success rate of tasks.

Question/task		Task success %	
		Yes	No
Q1	Locate information about trimming-related services	<u>100 %</u>	0 %
Q2	What brands of cat litter are available at the store?	<u>100 %</u>	0 %
Q3	Is the store open on Sundays?	<u>100 %</u>	0 %
Q4	What kinds of fish are available at the store?	0 %	<u>100 %</u>
Q5	Where is the store located?	<u>100 %</u>	0 %
Q6	Is the overnight pet sitting service available for dogs and cats?	<u>75 %</u>	25 %
Q7	How can the store be reached?	<u>100 %</u>	0 %

Q8	Does the store offer home delivery for bought goods?	<u>75 %</u>	25 %
Q9	How much does the pet sitting service cost for one pet if the pet stays for two days?	0 %	<u>100 %</u>
Q10	If you have a need for someone to come to your home and e.g. feed your pet during the day, can this store help you?	<u>100 %</u>	0 %
Q11	Why could it be a more ethical choice to buy a small pet from this store?	<u>25 %</u>	75 %
Q12	Does the store currently have bunnies?	0 %	<u>100 %</u>

Table 8. Results of measuring the success rate of completed tasks on the current website.

While the current website lacks content and as seen from the branding survey, does not excel in terms of visual appeal, the UX tests showed that its simplistic layout allowed for the available information to be mostly found (table 8). Thus, the current website can be deemed as being satisfactory in terms of technical usability and performance. In the UX tests most of the tasks and/or questions could be completed successfully on the current website as well. The questions that were not possible to answer were questions 4, 9 and 12 – the recorded performance data reflected this, as none of the participants were able to successfully complete these tasks.

However, these questions were not the only ones where participants faced problems, as some available information was not seemingly as easy to find or understand. While three of the participants were able to find information on the overnight pet sitting service, one of the participants could not locate the necessary information to answer whether the service was available for cats and dogs as well. The home delivery option was also not found by one participant.

The most difficult question to answer correctly proved to be question 11, where the participants were asked to find reasons why it could be more ethical to buy a small pet from this store. While the information exists in the current website, it is not explicitly spelled out anywhere but instead requires examining the banner graphics of the website. The

participants were observed to focus more on the actual content of the website, which resulted in only one of the participants figuring out the correct answer for the question.

After completing the UX test, the participants were asked to fill out a self-reported survey that consisted of questions and statements meant to measure the participant's opinions and feelings toward the site during and after using it.

The self-reported data about the participants' own perceptions of the website's UX somewhat reflected the observations. Although the success rate of locating information was quite high in practice, the lack of content likely affected the perceived easiness of finding information. As a result, the participants did not feel that the information on the website was easy to locate nor that the website was clear to navigate, as the average rating for both these aspects was 2,3. Conversely, the average rating for evaluating whether the website was informative or not was 3,0, despite the perceiving the information as hard to find (table 9).

Question/statement	Min value	Max value	Average	Median	Standard Deviation
It was easy to find the information I needed	2	3	2,3	2	0,5
The layout of the website was clear to navigate	1	3	2,3	3	1,0
I felt that the website was informative	2	4	3,0	3	0,8
The content on the website matched my expectations	2	4	2,5	2	1,0

Table 9. Detailed results of questions in the self-reported survey.

Although one participant felt that the website matched their expectations quite accurately, rating this question with the value of 4, most participants were not particularly pleased with the content as the average rating for it was 2,5 and the median was 2.

Question/statement	Min value	Max value	Average	Median	Standard Deviation
The website was easy to use	1	4	2,8	3	1,3

The company products were clearly defined and explained	1	3	2,3	3	1,0
I enjoyed using the website	1	4	2,5	3	1,3
I got a positive impression of the company	2	4	3,0	3	0,8

Table 10. More results from the self-reported survey conducted after the current website's UX test.

The simplicity of the website's design did not make most participants feel that the website was easy to use, as ease of using was rated with an average of 2,8 – however, there was some diversity within the opinions regarding this aspect as well (table 10). This likely affected how the participants enjoyed using the website, as the enjoyment factor received an even lower average rating of 2,5. Although the participants generally saw a lot of problems with the website, the impression of the company did not dip to the lowest possible rating with any participant, indicating that the participants likely still felt some level of connection to the brand despite the issues.

The strongest consensus was found when evaluating how well the company's products were presented on the website, as no participant rated this aspect as good.

The self-reported survey also included an open-ended question where the participants were allowed to leave an open comment about their experience when using the website. As this question was optional, only two participants decided to write about their opinions. Both of the participants had some complaints about the structure of the website, with one of them specifying that the layout of the site did not make the site seem secure, and that they could not get a clear picture of what services and products are available.

### 5.2.2 User experience on the new website

Due to the increased amount of content, the new website design has a significantly more complex structure than the commissioning company's current website does, and thus all of the tasks in the UX test were possible to complete successfully. While the new website design showed significant improvements when measuring the perceived branding, the UX

tests revealed some remaining problems – this time related to the complexity of the website’s structure.

Question/task		Task success %	
		Yes	No
Q1	Locate information about trimming-related services	<u>100 %</u>	0 %
Q2	What brands of cat litter are available at the store?	<u>100 %</u>	0 %
Q3	Is the store open on Sundays?	<u>100 %</u>	0 %
Q4	What kinds of fish are available at the store?	<u>75 %</u>	25 %
Q5	Where is the store located?	<u>100 %</u>	0 %
Q6	Is the overnight pet sitting service available for dogs and cats?	<u>100 %</u>	0 %
Q7	How can the store be reached?	<u>100 %</u>	0 %
Q8	Does the store offer home delivery for bought goods?	<u>50 %</u>	50 %
Q9	How much does the pet sitting service cost for one pet if the pet stays for two days?	<u>50 %</u>	50 %
Q10	If you have a need for someone to come to your home and e.g. feed your pet during the day, can this store help you?	<u>100 %</u>	0 %
Q11	Why could it be a more ethical choice to buy a small pet from this store?	<u>100 %</u>	0 %
Q12	Does the store currently have bunnies?	<u>100 %</u>	0 %

Table 11. Results of measuring the success rate of completed tasks on the new website design.

Despite all the information being available on the new website, not every task was completed successfully by all the participants (table 11). For example, even though three participants found information on the available fish at the store one of them was still not able to find the information. When observing the participants, this seemed to be due to the

assumption that this information would be found in the section about animals, rather than aquariums.

The two other questions where the participants faced problems were questions number 8 and 9, where they were tasked with finding information about the possibility for home delivery and finding out how much the pet sitting service would cost in a particular situation. When looking for information on the availability of home delivery services, the participants were observed not to completely understand how the structure of the dropdown menu worked, which resulted in them not being able to find the overview page for all available services. However, two participants were able to navigate their way despite these difficulties and answered this question correctly.

All participants were able to locate the information regarding the pricing of pet sitting services – however, two of them failed in calculating the correct price for the presented situation.

Despite the confusion felt during the usage of the website, the collected self-reported data showed that the participants were generally pleased with their experience.

<b>Question/statement</b>	<b>Min value</b>	<b>Max value</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Median</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
It was easy to find the information I needed	4	4	4,0	4	0,0
The layout of the website was clear to navigate	3	4	3,8	4	0,5
I felt that the website was informative	4	4	4,0	4	0,0
The content on the website matched my expectations	3	4	3,5	4	0,6

Table 12. Detailed results of some question in the self-reported survey regarding the new website design.

Overall, the participants had strong consensus over all the aspects evaluated in the survey. All participants agreed that the information on the website was easy to find – the issues faced with the navigation being the likely culprit as to why the participants did not strongly

agree with the statement. This also likely affected how clear the participants thought the website was to navigate, as some participants neither agree nor disagreed with this statement. However, this also received an average rating of 3,8, thus leaning more toward agreement.

All of the participants agreed on the website being informative and gave it a rating of 4 on the scale. Although not strongly agreeing, the general opinion about the website was that it somewhat matched the expectations of participants, as it was rated an average of 3,5.

Question/statement	Min value	Max value	Average	Median	Standard Deviation
The website was easy to use	4	4	4,0	4	0,0
The company products were clearly defined and explained	3	4	3,8	4	0,5
I enjoyed using the website	4	4	4,0	4	0,0
I got a positive impression of the company	3	5	4,3	5	1,0

Table 13. More of the self-reported survey results from the new website design UX tests.

Despite the issues observed during the tests, the participants both agreed that the website was easy to use and that they enjoyed using it. However, the issues may have affected how clearly the participants thought the company's products were presented, as the average rating for it was 3,8.

Overall, the impression of the company was deemed positive as no participant disagreed with the statement, receiving an average rating of 4,3.

When given the chance to openly express their opinions toward the website's UX, only one participant decided to leave a comment, stating that they felt that the links on the main menu bar should be more clearly defined from each other. This comment was in line with what was observed during the test and with the answers to the close-ended questions.

### 5.2.3 Comparison of results

Due to the number of differences in the site structure and content, the performance data of the current and the new website cannot be directly compared – only whether the tasks were theoretically possible to complete and how many of the participants were actually able to successfully complete them. Because of these limitations, most of the comparisons between these different versions are made from the self-reported data, as the user's perception of the site is not dependent on having as close a similarity as possible

When observing the collected data, a clear difference in the results of both self-reported and performance data implies that the changes made in the design of the new website version had an impact in practice as well.

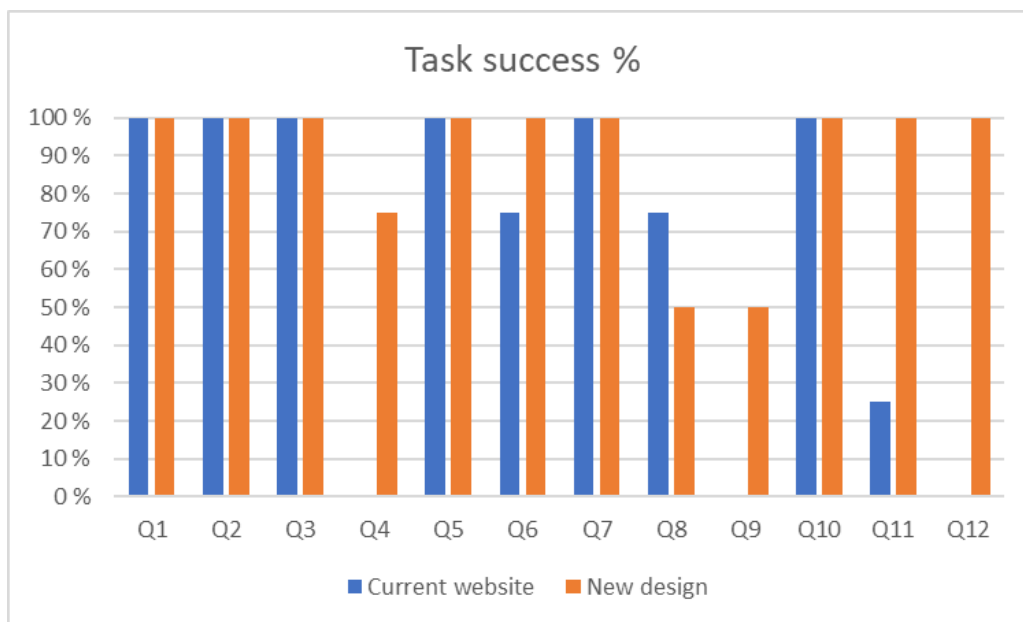


Figure 9. Comparison of task success rates between the current website and the new design version of it.

Overall, the task success rate improved on all tasks except for one (figure 9). The only measured performance data that suffered from a worse result on the new website version concerned the availability of home delivery service – on the new website only 50% of participants were able to locate this information, while on the current website 75% of them were successful. From the observations and the open comment left on the self-reported survey, the reason for this outcome lies in the confusion that participants felt when



navigating the site – while the information was clearly presented on the website, the participants failed to locate the page itself due to the hierarchy of the dropdown menu.

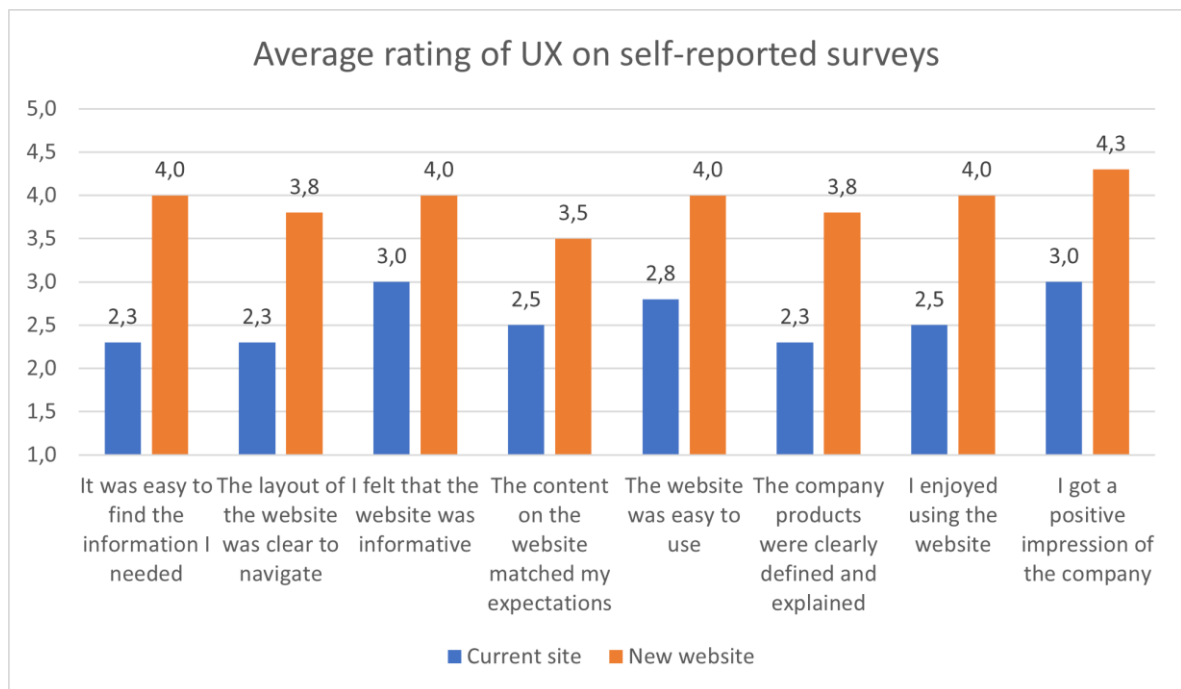


Figure 10. Comparison of average ratings on the self-reported surveys of the UX tests.

Although not every issue was completely resolved with the new website design, all the identified problems saw a rather significant change for the better when analyzing the ratings given in the self-reported surveys as well (figure 10). The participants seemed to feel that the website was more informative and easier to use, and that the layout was clearer than before. The company products were also thought to be a lot better explained, with a rating improvement of 1,5 points. There was also an improvement in how the participants saw the company based on their website experience. The biggest improvement was seen on the easiness of finding information, as it received an average rating of 1,7 points better than on the current website.

When comparing the opinions left to both self-reported surveys, it can also be observed that the participants no longer mentioned that the company's products were not clearly presented, nor that the site did not feel secure – this observation is also supported by the ratings given on the Likert scales. However, a new comment surfaced about the links on the

main menu bar needing to be more clearly defined from each other. This implied that while many of the issues were successfully resolved, some refinement still remained.

### **5.3 Summary**

As the results of the studies conducted on the current website showed, the existing problems, first identified in the introduction, were observed to exist in practice as well. The respondents to the branding study did not get a positive impression of the company based on the website alone, and the UX left an overall negative feeling due to the lack of information and the clearness of the layout. When conducting the studies on the new website version, almost all the measured aspects of both branding and UX improved. However, there are limitations to the reliability of these results.

While the reliability of the results is limited due to e.g. the samples not consisting of proved potential buyers and because the samples in the branding surveys were not the same when testing both versions, there are still some cautious implications that can be seen in the results. Even when considering the limitations of the study, the potential for improvement can still be observed. Thus, it can be recommended that the commissioning company should consider having their website redesigned or potentially have it replaced with the version designed as a part of this thesis. This could yield positive improvements in how their current and potential customers see their company.

### **5.4 Limitations of study**

While the author has done their best to provide accurate and reliable data with this thesis study, there are limitations to its reliability. With regards to the branding surveys, the most significant limitation is the samples used in the surveys as they did not consist of people who would be considered proved potential buyers. In addition, the respondents on both surveys were not the same, which makes it difficult to conclusively compare the results and thus, limits the reliability of the observed improvements. Had the sample consisted of people interested in the company's offerings and been the same for both surveys, the results could be considered a lot more reliable.

Although utmost care has been placed on crafting survey questions that are neutral in nature and do not make the answers biased in any way, it is possible that some of the questions have been worded in such a way that they have affected the respondent's recorded response in one way or another. While the most important aspects of perceived branding and brand personality were taken into consideration when deciding which questions to include in the surveys, it is also possible that some important dimensions have been overlooked and thus the respondent's perception of the brand is not covered in full detail.

The limitations regarding the UX tests have to do with the people testing the designs and the limited iterations. The recruited participants were acquaintances of the author and thus, their impression of the website's design may be more biased. However, the current epidemic situation had the author make the decision of excluding complete outsiders from the tests. When considering the number of conducted tests, having more iterations during the design stage would be likely to improve the end design and thus, improve the ratings in the UX tests. The questions and tasks presented to the participants were thought so that they would have to explore the websites fully – however, it may be that the significant differences between the current website and the new website design affected the tasks chosen, as not too many of them were thought to be appropriate to be impossible to complete on the current website. The lack of personal motivation to find information on the websites may have also affected how the participants were able to complete the tasks given to them.

Though the results of the studies have been analyzed quantitatively and as such, utmost care of being unbiased has been taken, there is a possibility that the author's personal investment in the creation of an important part of the research (i.e. the website design) may have affected the interpretation of the results. In addition, in the case of all study made during the thesis process, the author's lack of previous experience is likely to act as a limitation as it may have a negative effect on the reliability of results.

## 6 Conclusion

The commissioning company for the thesis was Pieni Eläinkauppa, a Finnish entrepreneur-run pet supply store which had some branding and usability-related issues on their website. While they had a surprisingly well-established internet presence in the form of social media accounts, their own website suffered from negligence and did not offer their customers enough in terms of information. As revealed by research done on the subject of current website standards, having this kind of website could have a negative impact on the perception of the company. Thus, the research question of “How to enhance the brand perception of Pieni Eläinkauppa with improved branding and UX on their website?” was formed.

The thesis process began by consulting the commissioning company about their needs regarding the new website; what content did the company want to have on the site, what should the site’s hierarchy look like and how should their company be presented via the site. This gave the author the necessary information for the website design process and allowed for the creation of the design later.

Having decided the research question and the necessary means of studying it, both branding and UX were thoroughly researched with the help of academic literature and current sources found on the internet. When looking into the topic of branding, it was revealed that all branding efforts are heavily linked to each other – some act as mediators to other brand-related emotions and perceptions, while others are the results of previous efforts and connections. For example, brand loyalty is heavily linked to brand experience, which in turn is formed by experiencing the brand, both directly by communicating and e.g. buying the brand’s products, and in a more subconscious and indirect way. Though branding consists of numerous levels and there is not a single aspect that definitively rules over the others, the visual design of a brand may affect the perception of a brand stronger than other aspects when no previous experience of the brand exists.

Two different surveys were used to research how people not previously familiar with the company would generally feel about them, based on the website alone. One of the surveys used screenshots of the current website, while the other one used pictures of the new

design version. When researching the perceived branding on the current site, it became clear that the respondents did not get a particularly positive impression of the company – they were seen as outdated, and the respondents did not feel that they would be interested in visiting the store, nor would they prefer the company over similar competitors.

Conversely, the new website design received a significantly more positive response from the respondents. All the measured aspects improved – the brand was perceived as more easily approachable, more professional and the respondents even developed a slight preference over competition.

The brand personality traits that the respondents linked with the company saw a massive change between the current and the new website design. The current website was mostly perceived negatively; for example, it was not seen as up-to-date or charming. On the other hand, when evaluating the branding on the new website version, the respondents connected the traits of honest and down-to-earth with the brand, implying that a more modern look did not take their company brand away from its intended core personality.

The UX on both website versions was measured by observing the participants and by asking for personal opinions with the help of self-reported surveys. Albeit being a relatively simple website in terms of its construction, not all of the tasks on the current website were successfully completed by all participants, despite being plausible to complete. From the self-reported surveys, this may be due to the information on the website being perceived as not very easy to find. However, the lack of content still did not make the participants judge the website too harshly.

When testing the new website design the UX improved, both in regards of performance data and self-reported data. The increased complexity of the website's structure added some additional difficulties to navigating the site, as not all participants were able to understand the used menu fully. This was revealed both during the observation of the participants and in their self-reported answers. These difficulties resulted in not all information being found during the UX tests. Despite this, the overall task success rate improved over the tests done on the current website, with the exception of one task.

However, all the participants perceived the new website as being more appealing in terms of UX and thought that it was more informative than the current one. The participants also saw the new version as being clearer and easier to use.

While it was a possibility to implement and replace the commissioning company's current website with the new design during the thesis process, the commissioning company did not provide their own materials to the website, thus delaying this process further into the future. Despite not yet being published officially on the commissioning company's own web hosting service, the project was considered to be relatively successful due to having been able to effectively address most of the issues found on the company's current website, even when considering the limited reliability of the results.

By observing the results of the tests, it is recommended that the commissioning company should consider testing the new website design in practice and see whether there are any positive changes in the statistics of their site, and how their customers react to the changes made. This could be done as an iterative process, thus helping to fix the possible issues that the visitors of the site point out. The current website could be updated by either replacing it with the design created during this thesis or by consulting a professional designer and going forward from there. Putting some focus into their website could potentially have a positive effect on the perception of their company's brand and how their current and potential customers see them.

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## Appendix 1: Branding survey questions in Finnish

1. Saan positiivisen vaikutelman tästä yrityksestä
2. Tämä yritys tuntuu ammattitaitoiselta
3. Tunnen voivani luottaa tähän yritykseen
4. Tunnen yrityksen brändin olevan selkeä
5. Valitsisin tämän yrityksen enemmän kuin toisen vastaavanlaisia tuotteita tarjoavan yrityksen
6. Tämä yritys vetoaa minuun
7. Nettisivujen brändäys on yhteneväinen
8. Nettisivujen brändäys on miellyttävä
9. Tuntuu siltä, että tämä yritys auttaisi minua saavuttamaan jonkin tavoitteeni
10. Tämä yritys tuntuu helposti lähestyttävältä
11. Arvioi miten hyvin eri persoonallisuustyypit kuvaavat mielestäsi yrityksen brändiä. 1 = Ei kuvaa ollenkaan, 5 = Kuvaa erittäin hyvin.
12. Tulisin tälle nettisivulle uudelleen
13. Kuinka todennäköisesti kävisit tässä liikkeessä nettisivujen perusteella?
14. Olitko kuullut tästä yrityksestä ennen tätä kyselyä?
15. Oletko koskaan aikaisemmin käynyt tämän yrityksen liikkeessä tai vierailut heidän nettisivuillaan?

## Appendix 2: Full results of branding survey

### Current website

Total number of respondents: 31

Question/statement	Min value	Max value	Average	Median	Standard Deviation
I get a positive impression of this company	1	5	2,7	3	1,2
This company feels professional	1	5	2,2	2	1,0
I feel that I can trust this company	1	5	2,5	2	1,1
I feel that the brand of this company is clear	1	5	2,4	2	1,2
I would choose this company over another one with similar products	1	4	1,9	2	0,8
This company feels appealing to me	1	5	2,1	2	1,1
The branding on the website is consistent	1	5	3,2	3	1,2
The branding on the website is appealing	1	5	1,8	2	1,1
I feel this company would help me fulfill a goal	1	5	2,3	2	1,1
This company feels easily approachable	1	5	2,9	3	1,3
I would return to this website	1	5	1,9	2	1,0
How likely would you visit this store based on the website?	1	4	2,1	2	1,0

Table 1. Questions and results for questions 1-10 and 12-13 on the survey about the branding on the current website.

**Question 11: Evaluate how well different personality traits describe this brand. 1 = Does not describe at all, 5 = Describes extremely well.**

	1	2	3	4	5	Average	Median
Outdoorsy	22.6%	25.8%	25.8%	16.1%	9.7%	2.6	3.0
Tough	16.1%	16.1%	22.6%	19.4%	25.8%	3.2	3.0
Upper class	71.0%	22.6%	3.2%	3.2%	0.0%	1.4	1.0
Charming	35.5%	32.3%	16.1%	12.9%	3.2%	2.2	2.0
Reliable	19.4%	29.0%	41.9%	3.2%	6.5%	2.5	3.0
Intelligent	32.3%	41.9%	22.6%	0.0%	3.2%	2.0	2.0
Successful	54.9%	29.0%	12.9%	3.2%	0.0%	1.6	1.0
Daring	38.7%	35.5%	19.4%	6.4%	0.0%	1.9	2.0
Spirited	29.0%	25.8%	32.3%	12.9%	0.0%	2.3	2.0
Imaginative	48.4%	32.3%	16.1%	0.0%	3.2%	1.8	2.0
Up-to-date	64.5%	29.1%	3.2%	0.0%	3.2%	1.5	1.0
Down-to-earth	6.4%	12.9%	19.4%	41.9%	19.4%	3.5	4.0
Honest	3.2%	12.9%	29.0%	35.5%	19.4%	3.5	4.0
Wholesome	6.4%	19.4%	41.9%	22.6%	9.7%	3.1	3.0
Cheerful	6.5%	25.8%	35.5%	16.1%	16.1%	3.1	3.0

Table 2. Results of assessing the suitable personality traits based on the current website

**Question 14: Had you heard of this company before this?**

	n	Percent
Yes	1	3.2%
No	30	96.8%

Table 3. Results of how many respondents were familiar with the company beforehand.

**Question 15: Have you ever been to this company's store or visited their website before?**

	n	Percent
Yes, I have been to the store	0	0.0%
Yes, I have visited the website	1	100.0%
Yes, I have both visited the website and been to their store	0	0.0%
No	0	0.0%

Table 4. Results of the question only presented to respondents who had heard of the company before.

### New website design

Total number of respondents: 24

Question/statement	Min value	Max value	Average	Median	Standard Deviation
I get a positive impression of this company	3	5	4,3	4	0,6
This company feels professional	2	5	3,9	4	0,9
I feel that I can trust this company	3	5	4,0	4	0,8
I feel that the brand of this company is clear	2	5	3,7	4	0,9
I would choose this company over another one with similar products	2	5	3,2	3	0,8
This company feels appealing to me	2	5	3,5	4	1,0
The branding on the website is consistent	3	5	4,4	4	0,6
The branding on the website is appealing	2	5	4,0	4	0,8
I feel this company would help me fulfill a goal	2	5	3,6	4	0,9
This company feels easily approachable	3	5	4,1	4	0,6



I would return to this website	1	5	3,5	4	1,1
How likely would you visit this store based on the website?	1	5	3,6	4	1,0

Table 5. Results of questions 1-10 and 12-13 on the new website design.

**Question 11: Evaluate how well different personality traits describe this brand. 1 = Does not describe at all, 5 = Describes extremely well.**

	1	2	3	4	5	Average	Median
Outdoorsy	0.0%	0.0%	25.0%	54.2%	20.8%	4.0	4.0
Tough	45.8%	37.5%	12.5%	4.2%	0.0%	1.8	2.0
Upper class	20.8%	25.0%	33.3%	16.7%	4.2%	2.6	3.0
Charming	0.0%	16.6%	29.2%	41.7%	12.5%	3.5	4.0
Reliable	0.0%	8.3%	33.3%	41.7%	16.7%	3.7	4.0
Intelligent	0.0%	25.0%	41.7%	29.2%	4.1%	3.1	3.0
Successful	4.2%	12.5%	41.7%	33.3%	8.3%	3.3	3.0
Daring	16.6%	29.2%	41.7%	4.2%	8.3%	2.6	3.0
Spirited	4.2%	16.6%	25.0%	41.7%	12.5%	3.4	4.0
Imaginative	8.3%	33.3%	29.2%	25.0%	4.2%	2.8	3.0
Up-to-date	4.2%	12.5%	20.8%	33.3%	29.2%	3.7	4.0
Down-to-earth	0.0%	12.5%	29.2%	37.5%	20.8%	3.7	4.0
Honest	0.0%	8.3%	20.9%	50.0%	20.8%	3.8	4.0
Wholesome	0.0%	4.2%	25.0%	45.8%	25.0%	3.9	4.0
Cheerful	0.0%	4.2%	20.8%	50.0%	25.0%	4.0	4.0

Table 6. Results for how well the respondents felt that different personality traits fit the brand based on the new website design.

**Question 14: Had you heard of this company before this?**

	n	Percent
Yes	1	4.2%

No	23	95.8%
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Table 7. Results for how many of the respondents had heard of the company before.

**Question 15: Have you ever been to this company's store or visited their website before?**

	n	Percent
Yes, I have been to the store	0	0.0%
Yes, I have visited the website	0	0.0%
Yes, I have both visited the website and been to their store	0	0.0%
No	1	100.0%

Table 8. Results for the question only presented to those respondents who had heard of the company before.

**Appendix 3: Questions on the self-reported surveys in Finnish**

16. Etsimäni tiedon löytäminen oli helppoa
17. Sivujen ulkoasu oli selkeä navigoida
18. Sivujen ulkoasu tuntui loogiselta
19. Koin nettisivun informatiiviseksi
20. Nettisivun sisältö vastasi odotuksiani
21. Tunsin hämmennystä käyttäessäni nettisivua
22. Nettisivu miellytti minua visuaalisesti
23. Nettisivun visuaalinen puoli vastasi odotuksiani
24. Nettisivua oli helppo käyttää
25. Kohtasin ongelmia käyttäessäni nettisivua
26. Yrityksen tuotteet oli selitetty ja kuvattu selkeästi
27. Nettisivu tuntui turvalliselta
28. Nettisivu tuntui luotettavalta
29. Nautin nettisivun käytöstä
30. Kävisin tällä nettisivulla uudelleen
31. Sain positiivisen mielikuvan yrityksestä
32. Nettisivu sai minut kiinnostumaan yrityksestä
33. Olitko kuullut yrityksestä aikaisemmin?
34. Oletko koskaan käynyt tämän yrityksen liikkeessä tai vierailut heidän nettisivuillaan?
35. Vapaa palaute käyttäjäkokemuksestasi:

## Appendix 4: Full results of the self-reported surveys

### Current website

Total number of respondents: 4

Question/statement	Min value	Max value	Average	Median	Standard Deviation
It was easy to find the information I needed	2	3	2,3	2	0,5
The layout of the website was clear to navigate	1	3	2,3	3	1,0
The layout of the website felt logical	2	4	3,0	3	0,8
I felt that the website was informative	2	4	3,0	3	0,8
The content on the website matched my expectations	2	4	2,5	2	1,0
I felt confused when using the website	2	5	3,5	4	1,3
The visuals on the website were appealing	1	4	2,5	3	1,3
The website visuals matched my expectations	2	4	2,8	3	1,0
The website was easy to use	1	4	2,8	3	1,3
I faced some problems when using the website	3	4	3,3	3	0,5
The company products were clearly defined and explained	1	3	2,3	3	1,0
The website felt secure	1	4	2,3	2	1,3
The website felt reliable	2	4	3,0	3	0,8
I enjoyed using the website	1	4	2,5	3	1,3
I would return to this website	1	4	2,0	2	1,4
I got a positive impression of the company	2	4	3,0	3	0,8
The website made me interested in the company	2	4	2,5	2	1,0

Table 1. Results of questions 1-17 in the self-reported follow-up survey regarding the current website.

**Question 18: Had you heard of this company before this?**

	n	Percent
Yes	1	25.0%
No	3	75.0%

Table 2. Results for whether the participants had heard of the company before the user experience tests.

**Question 19: Have you ever been to this company's store or visited their website before?**

	n	Percent
Yes, I have been to the store	0	0.0%
Yes, I have visited the website	0	0.0%
Yes, I have both visited the website and been to their store	0	0.0%
No	1	100.0%

Table 3. Results for the inquiry of whether the participant who had heard of the company before was more familiar with them or not.

**Question 20: Additional comments about your user experience**

Responses
Tuotepalkki alaosassa joka voisi olla näkyvämmiin yläosassa.
Sivujen ulkoasu ei anna selkeää kuvaa yrityksen palveluista tai tuotteista. Ulkoasu ei myöskään anna kuvaa siitä, että sivut ovat turvallisia käyttää.

Table 4. Comments about the user experience on the current website.

**New website design**

Total number of respondents: 4

Question/statement	Min value	Max value	Average	Median	Standard Deviation
It was easy to find the information I needed	4	4	4,0	4	0,0
The layout of the website was clear to navigate	3	4	3,8	4	0,5
The layout of the website felt logical	3	5	4,0	4	0,8
I felt that the website was informative	4	4	4,0	4	0,0
The content on the website matched my expectations	3	4	3,5	4	0,6
I felt confused when using the website	1	3	1,8	2	1,0
The visuals on the website were appealing	4	5	4,5	5	0,6
The website visuals matched my expectations	3	5	3,8	4	1,0
The website was easy to use	4	4	4,0	4	0,0
I faced some problems when using the website	1	3	2,3	3	1,0
The company products were clearly defined and explained	3	4	3,8	4	0,5
The website felt secure	1	4	3,3	4	1,5
The website felt reliable	4	5	4,5	5	0,6
I enjoyed using the website	4	4	4,0	4	0,0
I would return to this website	3	5	4,0	4	0,8
I got a positive impression of the company	3	5	4,3	5	1,0
The website made me interested in the company	3	5	3,8	4	1,0

Table 5. Full results for questions 1-17 in the self-reported survey about the new website design.

Question 20: Additional comments about your user experience

<b>Responses</b>
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Linkit eri sivuille saisi olla selkeämmin eriteltyinä

Table 6. Additional free comments about the user experience of the new website design.

## **Appendix 5: Data management plan**

### **General description of the data**

The data for this thesis is collected via online surveys and self-reported questionnaires and by observing the participants during conducted tests. Observation is supported by screen recording the tasks.

The online surveys can be completed by anyone who has access to their links. The surveys are shared on two specific online communities into which anyone can join. The surveys do not gather any personal information from the respondent. These online surveys are used in the gathering of branding-related data for this thesis, each one consisting of the same questions but asking said questions about differing things (i.e. current site of the commissioning company, and the revised site of the commissioning company).

The self-reported questionnaire also utilizes an online survey format; however, it is filled in only by the participants themselves after they have completed the user experience tests. The survey does not gather any personal information about the participant. Both the open access branding surveys and the self-reported questionnaires are conducted by using Webropol.

Observation and screen recording of tasks done on a computer are both used as a part of the user experience testing. OBS Studio is used in the collecting of screen recording data.

### **Responsible conduct of research**

The author has familiarized themselves in the ethical guidelines regarding thesis writing. The sources used in the thesis are appropriately referenced and the research methods chosen are based on the typical practices on the field. The methods of data collection used in the thesis process do not require research permits.

### **Analyzing the data**



The data collected during the research process is almost completely quantitative due to the usage of Likert scales in the surveys. This data is analyzed by observing how high or low the respondents rate their answers, and by contrasting the ratings given to the current website and the new design.

### **Storing data during the thesis process**

The data collected is stored on the author's personal OneDrive account during the thesis process, as the data does not include any kind of personal information. Backups of the data are also stored in the author's personal computer's hard drive. The author's personal computer, and thus also their OneDrive account, are both protected with a PIN code, and are not publicly used by other people.

The data for surveys is collected by using Webropol, and thus the submitted answers to the surveys is also stored on their web servers during the thesis process. The data on Webropol will be deleted once the thesis has been completed, and the data is downloaded to the author's OneDrive and/or personal computer's hard drive.

No personal or sensitive data is collected as a part of the thesis, as all collected data is completely anonymous.

The author keeps the ownership of data collected during the thesis process; however, the commissioning company is allowed to use the data collected in the surveys and user experience tests should they see a need for it.

### **Processing of data after completing the thesis**

The data collected during the thesis process will be stored on the author's personal OneDrive account and the author's personal computer's hard drive for 1 year after the completion of the thesis as per stated in the thesis instructions. After the one-year period, all data will be deleted from the author's storage locations – however, as the data is also shared with the commissioning company, they may keep the data for any period of time for later use should they so wish.

The data collected during the thesis process may be used later by the commissioning company.

### **Processing of personal data in the thesis**

The thesis does not gather any personal data.

### **Accessibility of the thesis**

The thesis is written by using the official HAMK thesis template and will be saved in a PDF/A format once completed, ensuring the technical accessibility of the thesis.